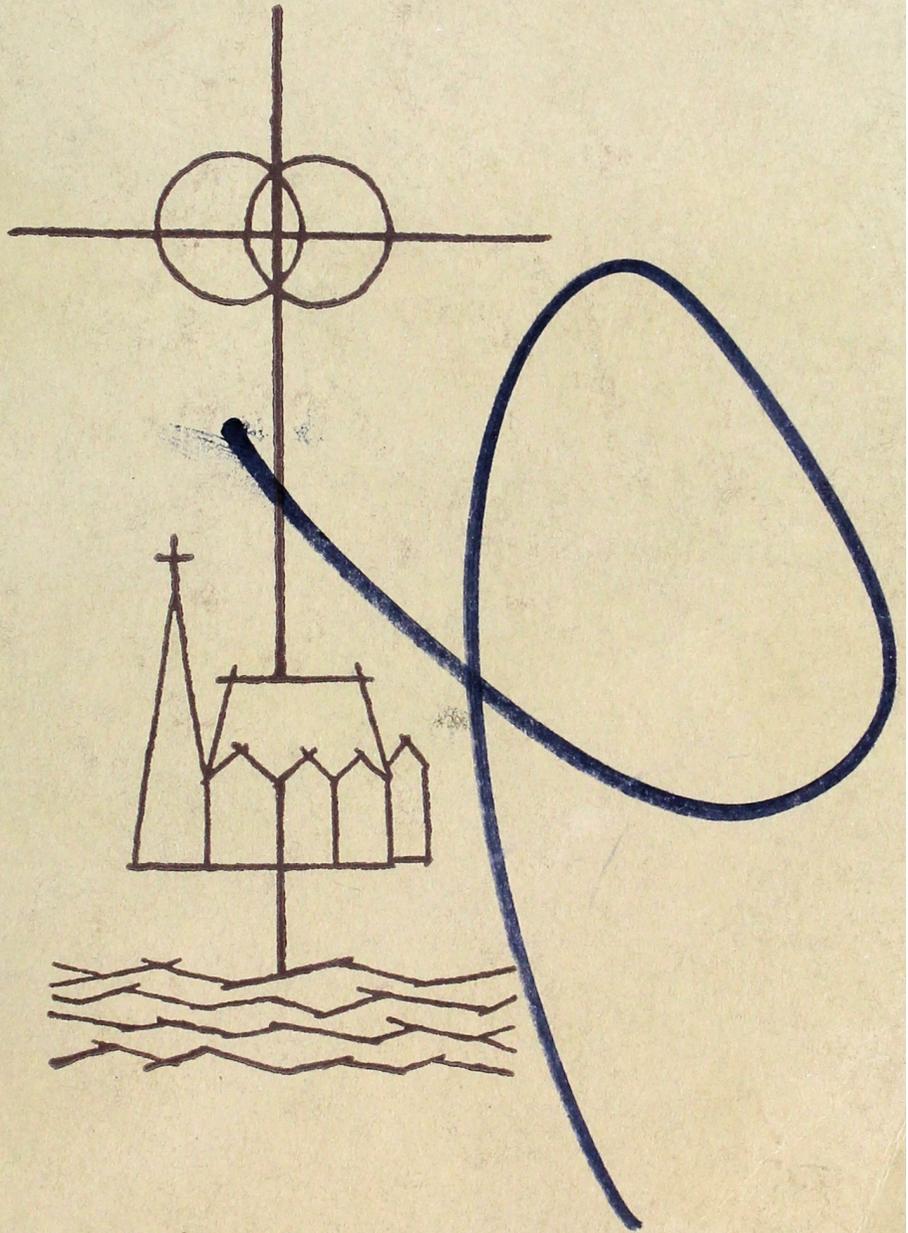


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MARRIAGE IS HOLY



Edited by H. CAFFAREL

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Translated by

BERNARD G. MURCHLAND, C.S.C.

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Preface

Rare are those Christians who think of thanking Our Lord for the magnificent gift of the sacrament of marriage. And yet, what would have happened to human love, if He had not renewed it? It was like the lepers and the possessed who waited outside the gates of the cities of Palestine for a Redeemer. The Savior passed by one day and elevated love. He cured it and blessed it. He delivered it from the terrible law of gravity that pulled it towards the animal and from the discouraging influence of routine and satiety. Henceforward love became indwelt by grace—the energetic, indefatigable grace that ennobles and constantly renews it. This grace utilizes, with supreme and delicate artfulness, the joys, sorrows and even the faults of love in order to perfect and consolidate the union of husband and wife.

In appreciation of this grace of the sacrament of marriage, a certain husband, after a severe crisis had passed, wrote these penetrating lines: “Yes, the sacrament is

upon us; we received it without being fully aware of what it was, but we were disposed to receive it. That is why it took root in us; it rewards us now for the vague gesture of confidence we placed in it and returns our love delivered, multiplied and rooted in the eternal.”

Christ redeemed love and He redeems it each day. He redeems it gratuitously, but He does not do so either in spite of it or without its collaboration. He demands of love, as of the sick in the Gospels, good will and faith. “Do you believe? Your love will be redeemed in the measure of your faith.”

It suffices to look about us to see what happens to those presumptuous marriages that pretend to dispense with the Savior. But young people in love who kneel humbly at Christ’s feet to beg His protection can face the future together with joyful hope. They have heard the Master’s words: “Behold I am with you all days, even unto the consummation of the world.”

Frequently in the course of married life, the couple must return to Christ to renew together the offering of their love and receive again His blessing. They must always guard against the temptation of looking upon the happiness of their union as though they alone were responsible for it. They must have something of the humble gratitude so admirably expressed in these words of a bride, written on the morning of her marriage: “Standing there, all robed in white, I was no longer conscious of anything; my heart was closed to everything that was not love and, in that moment, love and grace were one and the same thing. Grace had given birth to our love and was about to consecrate it. That ardent love turned towards grace and, by turns, thanked it and implored it, praised it and confided in it. Love cannot triumph

alone; it must kneel before grace and beg to be clothed, nourished and fortified by it for the glory of God. Love did not express itself in words; it remained silent. But it would gladly have done more than remain silent in order to let rise the voice of grace, the word of God, the Word of life that would guide its whole future.”

When Christ came upon earth, He not only redeemed creatures from their original infirmity. He offered them undreamed of powers of transcendence. One day, He mingled clay from the roadside with His spittle and with this mud restored the sight of a blind man. Upon the waters of the river, He bestowed the power of purifying hearts and making men children of God. On the eve of His passion He took bread and wine between His venerable hands: the bread became His body, and the wine His blood. Henceforth this bread and this wine would nourish souls. In the same manner Christ took possession of love, his most beautiful creation. He blessed it, consecrated it and made of the union in which this love is expressed a sacrament, that is to say, a source of grace. Love became sanctified. Love became sanctifying.

Throughout the centuries men have demanded of love consolation and the strength to live. They expected everything of love and yet they did not anticipate all that love could give. When Christ came He conferred upon love the power of giving His grace, His joy and His life.

When we meditate upon what Christ has done for love, we are astonished that there are those who imagine God is jealous of the love a man and a woman have for each other. Far from being jealous, He has made Himself the accomplice of this love; He does not look upon it from on high and afar; He dwells in it and associates

Himself with it to sanctify men and multiply their children.

Because of this presence of God, invisible but very real, between those who enter marriage, the vows they pronounce are heard with religious respect. It is similar to the Mass, in that moment when the voice of the priest changes the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ.

There is a passage in Pius XI's encyclical which encourages us to compare the sacraments of marriage and the Eucharist. This latter becomes a sacrament when the priest pronounces the words of consecration and remains so as long as the consecrated bread and wine last. Likewise, marriage becomes a sacrament when the two parties exchange their consent, and remains so as long as they live. It is a permanent sacrament.

Many interesting consequences could be drawn from this comparison. The Christian home is, like the Church, the dwelling place of a sacrament. Too many Christians ignore this. They think that they must go to the church to find grace. It is indeed true that Christ, substantially present under the appearance of bread, awaits them there and that the Eucharist is the great sacrament towards which all others converge. But it is not less true that the couple ought already to have drawn grace from the intimacy of their union, where Christ is present to give Himself to them and to help them in their common life.

Where love is lived in this perspective, grace is identified with it. If one grows, so too does the other. If one burns bright and clear, so too does the other. When on the other hand love is permitted to die out, grace becomes little more than a spark in the ashes. When love is

revived, grace will increase and, in its turn, will fortify and embellish love.

I do not intend here to defend the cause of conjugal morality which the Church teaches in God's name under the headings: indissoluble unity, inviolable fidelity and fecundity. I trust that those who read these pages are not among those who mock such sacred laws. Can we conceive Christ, who has done so much for love, imposing impossible restrictions on it? These laws are to be accepted, not with resignation, but with pride: they contain the secret that will assure the equilibrium, the harmony and the radiance of the marriage union.

H. CAFFAREL

Introduction

The principal concern of married couples ought to be a persistent effort to relate their marriage to something greater than their love for each other.

Such is the message of this book.

It is a strange message. In one sense, it is a contradictory message. But it is a vitally important one.

For marriage today is at a crossroads. Its vitality in tomorrow's society will be largely determined by how well it survives its present crisis. The Christian concept of marriage will prevail in the exact proportion that it is understood and shown forth by Christian husbands and wives.

Our society has become painfully conscious that marriage conceals many cruel deceits. Countless couples have experienced that perversity of soul which blinds them to the love they once had for each other. The years tend to smother that bright spark that makes every wedding an event of such beauty and such promise; routine soon

threatens to overtake the gay enthusiasm of the first years; trial and worry eventually disfigure the clear sincerity of youthful vows. Their name is legion whose love at some point or other goes out like a lamp that has consumed all its oil.

No marriage escapes this menace. Many succumb to it. As Paul Claudel once remarked: "Not many people really love each other." It is the tragedy of marriage today that so few have discovered the secret that keeps love a bright and growing thing.

Marriage can be looked upon in one of two ways: either as a mystery or a problem. The distinction between "mystery" and "problem" here is significant. One confronts a problem; one lives a mystery. A mystery involves us personally, as death; a problem is an impersonal concern, as a mathematical equation. We can step away from a problem, we can walk around it and survey it calculatingly. But we cannot separate ourselves from a mystery. It is part of ourselves. We are involved, committed.

Problems are divisive; mysteries are unifying. A problem permits of a number of decisions. Mystery permits only of acceptance. We can argue about a problem of politics; but we must accept the mystery of the seasons, for example. A problem is always smaller than we are; it can be circumvented. A mystery is always bigger than our own persons; it can only absorb us.

The most outstanding accomplishment of the essays in this book is to have insisted upon the primacy of mystery in marriage. In this way it provides a healthy and much-needed antidote to the "problem-attitude" that prevails about marriage in the modern world. Marriage is not to be looked upon as a problem that can be solved

—by divorce, or birth control, or free love. Such an attitude only multiplies the problems it attempts to overcome.

Strictly speaking, there can be no such thing as a problem of marriage. There can only be problems in marriage. There may be a psychological problem of compatibility, or financial problem of providing for the family, or a moral problem of limiting the family. The range of these problems is limitless.

But they cannot be solved at their own level. The problems that tend to divide in marriage must be approached in light of a deeper reality that unifies. Otherwise the whole meaning of marriage is compromised.

It is an illusion for young couples to begin marriage with the impression that their marriage is no bigger than their love for each other, that the strength of their marriage is the strength of that love. Nothing could be further from the truth. As someone has said: "Love does not make marriage." In other words, there is in marriage an element of mystery that carries it beyond the love two people have for each other and gives it a meaning greater than they could ever give it. In marriage, a couple embarks upon a life-long mission that implies far more than either of them can see or immediately understand.

There is no natural explanation of marriage. Reason cannot be the final arbitrator in matters of love. Mystery, in the sense it has throughout this book, has the meaning of sacred, for it is ultimately based upon the mystery of God. It also has the meaning of commitment because, in marriage, two people become part of something that is much greater than themselves. There can be no turning back once the hand is put to the plow.

As Germain Flammand, author of "The Scope of

Christian Marriage," writes in the first essay: "Love is an all absorbing thing; it is the whole of life. It is not only the love of two persons living together, but it is also the life of all humanity around them, the enormous and swarming life of the universe itself. . . . Christian marriage is not a network of social conventions; it is a love that has become conscious of itself, which has voluntarily committed and consecrated itself. Unity and indissolubility are not restrictions imposed upon love but essential exigencies that flow from the laws of its nature."

In another essay, Jacques Madaule, author of "The Flesh and the Spirit," expresses the mystery of marriage in these words: "Our love is made of the same stuff that unites God to the whole of mankind and to each individual soul. We know that the mystics have always used the language of conjugal love to describe the ineffable love of God and the soul. His love for us is the story of a long and difficult courtship that culminated in a spiritual marriage. Christ is the spouse of the Church; He espoused the Church on Calvary and conducts her affairs with solicitude that is ever conjugal. It is through Christ and through the Church that the couple we form and the family we have founded is linked up with the community of men. From the moment He is present, nothing is absent from the prayer we recite together."

Thus it is upon the mystery of God and His Church that the mystery of marriage finally anchors itself. Both are mysteries of life; both are mysteries of love; both are mysteries of unity.

But they are above all mysteries of sanctity. As God is holy and for the same reasons, so too is marriage. Here we strike upon the everlastingly real and inexhaustible meaning of marriage. Husbands and wives of today must

be told of the spiritual possibilities their marriage opens up to them; its rich symbolism and deep sacramental reality must be explained to them. They must be given the whole truth about marriage. They need this vision.

It is pointless to demand of the family a re-christianization of the world unless they be adequately armed with a full understanding of what they are about. It is equally pointless to pretend that they are not capable of assimilating the rich doctrine of marriage. There is in this attitude a fundamental injustice that should have no place in Catholic thought. Couples have a strict right to the fullness of Christian revelation in what concerns their proper vocation; the teaching Church is under strict obligation to render it available and intelligible to them.

This book is a brilliant effort in that direction. Each page penetrates more deeply into the truth of marriage. The authors here are not concerned with defending the Christian ideal of marriage; they desire above all to bear living witness to it. They go beyond the legalistic and moral definitions of marriage into that realm where only strong faith lights the way. They embrace the whole scope of Christian marriage and explore every possibility it offers for a more intense life and closer union with God. Marriage in their minds is less an institution than a way of life, a vocation.

It is a heartening sign of our times that these essays have grown out of a living experience. The writers are spokesmen for a group of Christian families who have faced their problems together. Periodically these families meet with their chaplains in the informal atmosphere of the home. Their problems directed them to the founts of revelation. What they learned here gave them the courage which those who pursue a difficult mission al-

ways need; it also gave them motivation to aspire towards greater heights of sanctity and achievement.

Their thinking is therefore dynamic and concrete. It is never far removed from the pressing problems families all over Christendom are experiencing. And it is always close to the central mystery of marriage. It is what Cardinal Newman would have called existential thinking. That is to say, thinking that provides a solution to problems personally felt. God is thus brought very close to reality. The God of these pages, as of these families, is indeed the living God!

A word might be said about the original text. Although many of these articles were written by outstanding literary figures, none of them was interested in expressing his thoughts in immortal prose. It was not an easy text to translate. There is about the original a breathless, impatient quality that is more characteristic of poetry than of prose. The translator sensed a note both of urgency and of depth—the fragmentary, hasty effort to catch an intuitive thought or a fleeting insight on the wing. These essays were written under the pressure, which these families felt, of girding themselves against dissolution with the strong armor of their faith. In that spirit they are here offered to other families.

It is sometimes said that there are no longer any heroes in America. But anyone who has been in contact with any of the many Catholic homes in this country, knows how false that is. Anyone who has been at all close to the problems of these families, who has shared in their anxieties and temptations, and to a certain extent in their loves and their hopes, knows that in such families the battle for Christ is being fought on a heroic scale. It is here that the truth of Christ's presence in His Church is

felt as a practical fact. Such families, particularly, will find immense profit in reading these pages. In this way their number will be increased; in this way those countless homes that are a victim of their times will be diminished.

It is fitting that our final word be one of dedication to Our Divine Lord's own family, the family into which He chose to be born, the family in which He lived for thirty years, the family of Joseph and Mary. We sometimes forget that Joseph and Mary were husband and wife. And we so often fail to understand that in this family human love and Christian marriage reached an unparalleled degree of perfection. The family of Nazareth will remain until the end of time as the paragon of all marriages. In the calendar of the saints it is this husband and wife which the Church has placed in the highest position. Priests and Sisters, Bishops, even Popes and martyrs only follow after these two.

PART I

THE HEIGHT AND THE DEPTH

THE SCOPE OF MARRIAGE
THE SPLENDOR OF HUMAN LOVE
UNITY IN MARRIAGE

CHAPTER I

The Scope of Marriage

Words are merely the exchange currency of our minds. And like any currency they can sometimes undergo influences exterior to themselves that alter their value.

Among all words thus exposed those of "love" and "marriage" have been particularly devaluated. Just what does love mean for most of our contemporaries? Some think it a sentimental dream, an adolescent emotion or an imaginative refuge against daily routine; perhaps others might consider it a simple hygiene or an agreeable pastime. In any and all cases it is pretty well understood that "love is not life." Life is made up of activities that are much more austere and durable!

The meaning of marriage has likewise been strangely reduced and distorted. Among those who still retain some sense of and respect for its meaning, and who consider it more than a mere association of interests, how many see in it more than a social institution whose laws must be followed as a matter of duty in the name of abstract

and rigid principles? Very few indeed understand it as the warm and living communication of two persons who alone give life and the world their full meaning.

If love and marriage have become so far removed from life, if they have been reduced to little better than a shadow of themselves, it is because we have not set our ideal of them high enough. To think of love as pleasure and marriage as duty is to caricaturize the meaning of both. Love is an all absorbing thing; it is the whole of life. It is not only the love of two persons living together but it is also the life of all humanity around them, the enormous and swarming life of the universe itself. And marriage is best defined as adult love. That is to say a love that is conscious of its human and cosmic responsibilities. All mankind, all society, all of creation: such is the scope of Christian marriage and the theme of this essay.

Marriage and Man

Leonardo da Vinci once said: "The greater a man is, the deeper is his love." There is no human act in which a person reveals himself or involves himself so totally as in love. In love the best that is in us is brought out to the greatest advantage. What is often referred to as an amorous illusion, a sort of luminous halo that envelops a person in love, is not an error of the senses or of the imagination; it is the perception of a marvelous reality, otherwise invisible; it is the contemplation of the divine image that is so deeply a part of each one of us. It is a matter of common experience that as soon as we are touched by the mystery of love interior springs are mysteriously loosed and what is most pure and noble in us rises up and blossoms in our countenance.

Around this fundamental impulse, as Stendhal put it, our whole personality crystallizes. When passion possesses us it colors, by the force of its very nature, all of our activities, thoughts and dreams; it dominates, absorbs and consumes our whole being. And what passion does, love can do on a much more elevated level. The "unity of spirit," which a writer like Morgan sought so avidly and so hopelessly, is the secret of any strong personality.

Love, by centering all of our activities into one total offering, gives us that unity.

Our adolescence was only a series of points of departure; much like a small dog capering recklessly about, we tested ourselves in every direction; culture, friendship, prayer, the apostolate—all of these things probably had their place in our adolescent years, but they lacked the definitive security of maturity. Adolescence was a time of preparation for a life as yet unknown, so many efforts in anticipation of work that could be done only later on. Then, one day, someone came into our lives and the totality of our strength and desires came to focus about that person. Our whole past appeared as a preparation for the mission we are now called to fulfill: to complete another human being who without us could not reach fulfillment, and with whom we could finally begin our life's work. The slow maturation of the past—participation in sports, intellectual culture, artistic refinement, spiritual awareness—was a necessary prelude to this moment. It was the natural path which led to a work that is, strictly speaking, divine: the work of living one's life.

But love adds more to our personality than this unity centered in a person and in a mission. Love urges our personality to go beyond itself. We might recall da

Vinci's epigram: "The greater a man is, the deeper is his love." A man who has no desire for a wife and home will not know the real grandeur of a leader. In marriage and the home he is no longer dealing with money or machines or even other men; he is personally responsible for the flesh and soul that breathes beside him, for this person who lives for him. His influence here will be recorded in eternity.

Likewise, a woman who does not have a home and children will always be the prey of an obscure and tormenting thirst for that immolation and sacrifice which is the stuff of her grandeur. One without the other, man and woman will never be more than imperfectly virile or feminine, unless they find that perfection in a vocation of supernatural dedication. They need each other to be themselves. Marriage is like a mirror in which our true self appears clearly, brilliantly, and purely. We are then capable of resembling that image; for we can never become great by our own efforts but only through the exigencies of an admiring and patient love.

Thus love is not only unity, but fulfillment. And because it is fulfillment it is completion. It has become commonplace to speak of the masculine and feminine natures completing each other because they are different: intuition and reason, sensibility and action, sense of the individual and sense of the universal—one furnishes what the other lacks. We may even go so far as to say that the complete human being is the couple. But in a facile juxtaposition of the characteristics of the two sexes lurks a danger. Undoubtedly conversation and various exchanges between the sexes enrich one with the riches of the other; but the mystery here is more interior. In Claudel's words: "Love more than knowledge is a knowledge."

The exterior presence of a man and woman, even when it is most intimate, is only a sign of an invisible and interior presence. The profoundest complement of the two sexes is a spiritual one. A husband becomes spiritually interior to his wife; she, in the biblical imagery, becomes the "rib" of her Adam; that is to say, as Claudel again put it, "the bone that envelops his heart." Henceforward it is within herself that a woman experiences the reason and force of her husband; and man, wherever he is or whatever he does, is always accompanied, sustained and inspired by the interior presence of his wife. It is even recommendable at times to attenuate the vibration of physical presence, to get away from one another, to close one's eyes and remain silent in order to permit the expression of this silent song of love, which, more than anything else, resembles grace.

Once this spiritual possession is attained, there is no longer any conflict between contemplation and action, between the intimacy of love and exterior activity. The labor of husband and wife is ever at the service of their love and becomes the expression of that love. A man who bears the interior presence of his wife within him brings new strength to his work, the very strength of his love. This may not be immediately noticeable to others or even to himself, but its effects are immense. So too a woman who possesses her husband "in spirit and in truth," will be an infinitely greater and surer source of life, of strength and of peace than when, like a boat adrift in the open sea, she sought her harbor.

We must add that this kind of human fulfillment is possible only in married love. Even the most passionate and faithful of free loves contains a germ of agony and fragility; like a bouquet of flowers, it has no roots. Chris-

tian marriage is not a network of social convention; it is love that has become conscious of itself, which has voluntarily engaged and consecrated itself. Unity and indissolubility are not restrictions imposed upon love but essential exigencies that flow from the laws of its nature. Husband and wife are "two in one flesh." We cannot improve upon the Bible's definition for it expresses not only a Divine command but the deepest desire that can rise from the human heart.

It is also within the framework of married love that we attain our highest fulfillment which is not human but supernatural. For since the passage of Christ among us marriage is a sacrament: that is, a divine gift united to a human gift. Penance, the Eucharist, and personal prayer remain the principal sources of grace and through them God acts more directly. But married persons are also the ministers of Christ for each other. Throughout their conjugal life there is a mysterious circuit of love and grace: whatever brings a husband and wife closer to one another (mutual consent, devotion, and sacrifice) can bring them closer to God, and whatever brings them closer to God brings them closer to one another. God alone is love; only He can teach us how to love: "Husbands love your wives as Christ loved His Church." What shines forth in the clear waters of perfect conjugal harmony is nothing less than the mystery of the espousals between God and humanity. Evidently it requires time and effort to reach this harmony—it is, in point of fact, the work of a lifetime—but to the degree it is attained, love's greatest joy is to be a reflection of God.

Thus all life—human and divine—enters into the notion of love. We can measure the success of our lives and

the strength of our personalities by our success in love. Upon that depends our personal equilibrium, our social influence, and our spiritual progress.

Marriage and the Universe

Thus far we have considered marriage only in its relation to men and women, but its scope is infinitely more vast. It goes beyond the two persons united in marriage, touches upon the very foundations of society and includes the universe itself.

In one of his novels, Jules Romains uses the evocative phrase: "The world and its adventure." The adventure of love is nothing less than the world. Modern paleontologists and biologists like to give us a harmonious vision of the cosmos. The different kingdoms are not independent of one another: the material and the sentient, the sentient and the rational, the rational and the spiritual—throughout all of these orders there is a progressive evolution. Although one order cannot accede of itself to a superior order, it nevertheless aspires towards it and if it is aided by an external force can reach it. Universal history would then be nothing other than the obscure groping of all natural forces towards a paradise of the spirit and of charity, a gradual gestation towards the "new heaven" and the "new earth" of which St. Paul and the Apocalypse speak.

The notion of love fits well into this interpretation of things. For love is the strongest force at work in creation. It is the dynamic drive behind all change and becoming in the world, the great germ of life that is handed on from one marriage to another. When two people love each other, they project a great creative urge that is

much larger than themselves: they participate in a divine gesture, a force that on the first day of creation set the planets spinning in space. When God told Adam and Eve to "increase and multiply" He repeated to them what He had already said to the animal kingdom. This was not so much to liken them in any way to the animal world as to signify that by their union they entered into the enormous enterprise of creation.

What science and the Bible suggest to us concerning the mystery of life, certain oriental philosophers apply to the inanimate world as well. In the very physical structure of the world there are male and female elements which attract one another, meet and unite. Thus all the laws of association and rapprochement of bodies, from sidereal gravitation to the various chemical affinities, are but the unconscious workings of blind love. Without going into the intricacies of philosophy, we can affirm here that when two people love one another they then become aware of their solidarity with all of creation. In giving themselves to each other, they fall in step with the rhythm of the universe!

But marriage is much more than a cosmic mechanism. It has something in common with nature but is far superior to it. What in nature is only attraction, affinity, instinct, soulless automatism, becomes in man the highest expression of liberty. This obscure force which always stirs the blood of creatures finds its fullest meaning in a love that is intelligent and free in its choice and consecration. An animal instinct thus becomes a spiritual force. The synthesis of the chemical world and biological attraction—all that is marvelous in nature—tends towards the communion of two souls. In the pact by which a man and woman pledge their love to one another the

movement of the universe is not only recognized but ennobled.

This manner of seeing the work of love in the whole created universe shows forth its marvelous fertility. Its human radiation is an essential element of all social life; through it society receives its warmth, its strength and its life. It is often said that "the family is the basic cell of society." We might ask ourselves why this is true. Is it because the family replenishes society with new members? This viewpoint is correct but it is only quantitative and does not touch upon the central issue at all. Is it because through the family are transmitted certain moral principles which are indispensable for the common good such as justice, honor, fidelity and honesty? Here it might be objected that certain organizations—schools, political parties, youth movements could accomplish this work. In what then is the family unique and irreplaceable? It is unique and irreplaceable in this, that it hands down from parents to children, and contributes to society, the mysterious force of love. A love that is the total and perpetual gift of two human beings is at once the model and the instrument of all society.

A society that limits itself to a similarity of interests soon suffocates; a society without love is little better than a prison. Because the family is *the* source of love, it is the generative cell of the human race. Other institutions can develop this love but only the family can give it. That is why the Church has based her whole social doctrine upon the family. Once we have taken as a fundamental social norm the evangelical command "Love ye one another," we have no choice but to place the family at the heart of the great organism of society. Political and economic societies have their own set of laws and

particular structure but they are human, and we might ask ourselves if they could succeed in uniting mankind if they were not dominated by that respect for the liberties, that desire for personal development, that ideal of servitude and passion for understanding that only love can give.

The strength of a man is his capacity for love; the strength of a society is the strength of love that unites its members. Love is not something that can be imposed from without; it comes from within and is passed on from person to person. The apprenticeship for social charity which the world needs today must be served in the family for it is there, and only there, that man gives himself freely and totally.

It is in this perspective that we can understand not only the social value of married couples but of the child as well. If a child were merely a numerical addition, mankind would not be greatly enriched. Numbers have no importance unless they are accompanied by values. And these values do not ultimately reside in physical force, intellectual culture, or professional competence. None of these things is of any social or human worth unless it is interiorly animated by one passion: the passion to serve. Otherwise we have a proud recluse, a Nietzschean superman, a dictator; in short, a difficult and perverted individual who destroys everything he touches and ends by destroying himself. A child can acquire an understanding of man, a respect for people, the ideal of service to others and a sense of the spiritual relations that unite men only through the family. Other institutions can give the rest, perhaps better. But only the family can give the sense of love. "Sow in love and you will reap in love" the proverb has it. What society reaps

from mankind is what the family has sown in the heart of the child.

It is not difficult to find proof of this. Recent history has only too well demonstrated what happens to a society in which conjugal and familial love no longer have a place. Everything disintegrates. Even the meaning of the words "man" and "woman" is lost. Man becomes the "male," a brutish egotist, and never more so than when he is a hero. And woman becomes his plaything, unless under pretense of equality she tries to imitate him and thus develops into a repulsive caricature. One of the saddest tragedies of our times is the almost total masculine coloration of values. When the sense of love disappears, the meaning of paternity is also confused. Children become tools of the State and social authority rests with the strongest dictatorship. Again, if the meaning of love is lost the equilibrium between the flesh and the spirit breaks down; sexuality becomes a mocking travesty of love. And when sex is no longer referred to love, souls withdraw into themselves and wither away.

A society that refuses love becomes astonishingly and pitifully simple. It erases the difference of personalities under the weight of authority, stifles liberty under the coercion of a few harsh and abstract principles, and forces everything into rigid uniformity. The overriding law then becomes "each man for himself." A society without love is a kingdom of solitude.

When we lose this sense of love, we lose the sense of man. We also lose all sense of God. For the adventure of love leads to Him. Both society and the Church are engaged in this adventure. And just as love is a source of union for society so too is it a source of charity for the Christian community which is the Church.

That is the proper sacramental mystery of marriage. For each new growth in love should be accompanied by an increase of grace. It is the measure of generosity with which husband and wife respond to the inspiration of their love that they develop the spirit of service and sacrifice for each other, that one becomes an instrument of sanctification for the other. It is by that measure too that they augment the capital of charity that is the very life of the Church. That is why marriage is such a splendid image of the union of Christ and the Church. The mission of Christ was to store up treasures for His Bride; the mission of husbands and wives is to augment that treasure.

It is in families, and according to the quality of love that reigns in families, that God will find His apostles, His doctors, His virgins—all of those who one day will answer the challenge of a pure and total and supernatural love. The greatest hope of the Church today is the apostolate of the family; the desire young couples all over the world have to discuss, understand and meditate upon the mystery of their vocation. It is the first symptom of a spiritual renewal. The Church needs priests and she needs them desperately; but the task of rebuilding a Christian world is still more urgent. And to do this we must first of all rebuild the Christian family. In this manner we will be preparing a generation of priests, indeed of saints—that is to say, men and women who “believe in love” according to the beautiful definition of St. John.

The treatise on “The Eminent Dignity of Love in the Church” has still to be written. But it is of small importance that it be set down between the covers of a book if it is already being lived in hearts.

Such is the scope of marriage: it is a challenge to the

whole man. It involves the individual and the community, the human person and the religious person, society and the Church. We well realize that other factors besides love are necessary in molding men and society. What we are insisting on here is that without love they are all quite useless.

CHAPTER II

The Splendor of Human Love

What is conjugal love?

To answer this question, I think we must first of all distinguish conjugal love from all other loves, yet being mindful of Lacordaire's immortal line to the effect that there is only one love. But conjugal love, unique in its essence, admits of as many different kinds as there are objects to which it is directed and the different relations that exist between them.

There are three fundamental characteristics of conjugal love that are immediately noticeable. First of all, it unites two people of different sexes; second, it unites them irrevocably in view of a common good and the foundation of a family; finally, it is a sacramental love—sanctified by the grace of God.

The love that attracts man towards woman and woman towards man is the most natural and the most ardent of all. It is founded on an appetite that has its roots in the very duality of our natures. With very few exceptions, it

is always an elective love. A man is not attracted by any type of woman and vice versa. For here we are in a domain in which the sexual appetite is inextricably bound to quite another type of choice that bears on the totality of the person as composite of body and soul. Because the soul is involved, we are offered something infinite and inexhaustible. For this reason, too, there is always a kind of essential dissatisfaction in love which we must not dissimulate.

The two souls remain separate, as the bodies themselves whose union lasts only for a few moments. This gives rise to a ceaseless struggle in which the most satisfying of victories is immediately followed by a sort of relapse. It almost seems as if a trap were set for us into which we are continually falling. We cannot imagine what the union of man and woman in primitive innocence might have been, but it is certain that the curse of Genesis tainted the love of Adam and Eve. Men and women both nourish the illusion that love is capable of taking them back to the perfection of ancient Paradise, but they soon encounter the flamboyant sword of the Seraphim guarding the gates. That is the reason why we take such passionate interest in the love stories that form the basis of nearly all of the world's literature.

Man and woman aspire to constitute together a perfect society, a world sufficient unto itself and excluding everything else. Cardinal Richelieu one day asked Madame de Cavoye, the wife of his captain of the guards, whether she would prefer the world to perish or her husband. She said she would sacrifice everything for the sake of her husband. "In that case, what would become of you?" interrogated the Cardinal. "Ah," said the lady,

“we would do as Adam and Eve and begin all over again!”

We must face the fact that in such an attitude are hidden certain dangers—particularly that of egoism; and even the egoism of a family is not much more respectable than individual egoism. There exists in man a fundamental contradiction: infinite in his desires, he is terribly limited in his means. On the plane of love, one other person suffices to satisfy our hearts. Henceforward we can only give to those we have not thus chosen an inferior kind of affection or friendship. Love is never thought of as being divided. It is a total gift of oneself to another that admits of no reservation.

In this sense love is an essentially arbitrary gift and often apparently unjust. But since it is also a gift of the inexhaustible to the inexhaustible, there is no danger, if it is well understood, of its reaching satiety. It is nevertheless important to realize that, if it is an essential part of man and woman's life, it is not for all of that the whole of their life. It is not exclusive of affections of another order and normally it should encourage them. A boy and girl who marry do not thereby renounce all affection for their parents, relatives or friends. They should, on the contrary, include this love, insofar as they can, within the scope of their conjugal intimacy.

“I come to you with a past which is not yours, but which we will share together in the future. In me you will love mine and I will love yours in you. You and I are something altogether new, the result of a long history that is infinitely more complicated than the few years we remember of our childhood and adolescence. I love what remains in you of the little girl and I like to hear you tell me of your childhood memories. I know that

our life did not begin with our first meeting, and it is good that it should be so. You pre-existed my love as I pre-existed yours. I love in you what I do not know and what would take more than a lifetime to discover. If you were only the woman of my first meeting you would not be so mysteriously and perpetually attractive.”

Human love is not outside of time, but *in* time. It is a history that we live together and that death will interrupt. The error of certain mortal passions is to wish to get outside of time. Conjugal love accepts the limits of time and makes of them the matter of constantly renewed joy. In accepting the limits of time, they accept the world. The home of a married couple is not a home with closed doors. It is open to the past, to the surge of memories, to the origins of man. It also opens on the future and fixes its hope on the paternal mansions of heaven.

It is open to the future and the children that will come. In them we recognize a double resemblance: that of ourselves and that of God which transcends our reason and before which we can only marvel as instruments of God.

Our home looks especially to heaven, to eternity and to God Who was not only present on the day we exchanged our sacramental vows but Who always remains between us, not to separate but to unite us the more closely. If there is only one love, then our love is made of the same stuff that unites God to the whole of mankind and to each individual soul. We know that the mystics have always used the language of conjugal love to describe the ineffable love of God and the soul. His love for us is the story of a long and difficult courtship

that culminated in a spiritual marriage. Christ is the spouse of the Church; He espoused the Church on Calvary and conducts Her affairs with a solicitude that is ever conjugal. It is through Christ and through the Church that the couple we form and the family we have founded is linked up with the community of men. From the moment He is present, nothing is absent from the prayer we recite together.

Thus a man and a woman who freely choose one another are united before God. They have come together not only for the purpose of founding a family, for they are not sure that their union will be fruitful, but also because the love they have conceived for each other has need of a confirmation and of a seal. They do not trust the intermittency of their hearts. They never will be able to take exception with the witness they have chosen. He will always be there to remind them of the hard and narrow road.

This Presence in the heart of intimacy, this Divine Law which is super-added to our human mode of acting, may seem to some to be unnecessary; they may well fear that duty will impose what the heart refuses. Such is often the case, in any event, and I admit that, in spite of my great admiration for the sublime "Polyeucte," I am somewhat embarrassed by certain traits in Pauline's character. We like to love and be loved not because it is necessary, but because we could not do otherwise even if we desired to. There is nothing less fatal and more providential than conjugal love. It is when we try to escape God that we fall into the domain of fatality. Thus when I overcame my distaste for the character of Pauline, I discovered that there is no more perfect poem of conjugal love than "Polyeucte." She loves Severe by

choice, but it was in the political interests of her father to give her to Polyeucte. She therefore loves Polyeucte by duty and it happens that, in accomplishing her duty she opens herself to the invasion of grace. We understand in this drama what liberty is and that only by assuming the responsibility of a liberty that was impossible outside of marriage did Pauline fulfill herself.

We cannot avoid the exigences of the Divine Law. Precisely because it is a religion of freedom, Christianity is also a religion of commitment. That one word suffices to determine a life is proof of a liberty that God respects by sanctioning it. Indeed He does even more though, for the most part, we are not aware of it. He is, from the moment of their mutual consent, more interior to the husband and wife than they are to themselves. He is the inextinguishable hearth of their reciprocal love. Of course, violence must not be done to nature. But we should be on guard against nature's weaknesses and not presume upon its strength. It is essentially changing and diverse, subject to dissatisfaction and failings. The natural successes that we can observe around us should not delude us. They are situated in the same climate of profane antiquity which made us admire heroic women of Greek drama. They were models of conjugal love and merit all of our respect. But there was lacking to them the power to get above themselves which is the proper quality of Christian love.

These words may appear somewhat harsh to young couples beginning their married life in joyous fervor. But the mortal danger of human love is to believe in its own self-sufficiency. In truth, creatures themselves are only insufficiency and their greatest happiness is to recognize their insufficiency. We can only fulfill ourselves

by going beyond ourselves. Our temporal equilibrium is not in immobility but in change which is constantly renewing us. In the heroines of antiquity, I admire the immobile and statuary. Faithful to their husbands as to themselves, ten years are as one day to them. They are patient and rigid and bear up under difficulties with a melancholy and steadfast heart. And what the noble Alcestis (a character in Moliere's "Le Misanthrope") sought in death was perhaps the fulfillment that life refused her. Christian marriage is not like that. Men and women, united by the bonds of a sacrament, row and sing on a galley buffeted by the winds and waves.

Neither fair winds nor stormy seas can surprise them. They have accepted everything beforehand. They have accepted the wrinkles that come with age and the bitter fatigue when, on certain evenings, they no longer have the strength to talk. The burden is heavy, but there are two of us to carry it. Or rather, by a reciprocal gift, we form a community where the I and You are no longer distinguishable. Your joy is my joy; your suffering is my suffering; your grandeur my grandeur; and even your sins are also mine. To take everything this way, the best with the worst, we must first of all have given everything. It is not easy and it supposes a rare quality of love.

Conjugal love, in effect, is above all a reciprocal gift. What we have chosen on our wedding day is much less to take than to give: to give oneself entirely and without reserve. "For every man," Charles Morgan writes somewhere, "the essential thing is to know to what he is capable of sacrificing his life." Such is the origin of every vocation and, consequently, of the vocation of marriage. We might say that it is a vocation of self-

giving in the plenitude of human love. Higher vocations undoubtedly exist. But there are none more harmonious and perhaps in no other does the continuity of nature and of grace appear so evident.

But if conjugal love is a reciprocal gift it does not follow that it is exactly the same in husband and wife. Man is turned towards the outside world. It is in this world that he works and creates; it is from this world that he draws the means to sustain his family. He is like the branches and leaves of a tree spread out beneath the heavens, like the roots that run deep into the nourishing earth. What man gives above all is his work, his protective strength, something that, no matter how much of it he has, remains outside of him. Woman, on the contrary, is predisposed to the household. She is that silent presence in the home which the husband, who is so often not there, knows is never lacking. She is like the sap that distributes through invisible channels the life that rises from the roots to the branches and leaves. It is truly she who gives herself without any mental reservations. It is her glory to be able to do so, as it is the mortal regret of man to be destined to exteriority.

Conjugal love is thus constituted by two kinds of presence at once different and complementary. This difference explains the tragic element which, even in the best of cases, remains a part of human love. It is impossible that man not suffer from his incurable activity, from this state of distraction that is so natural for him. However humble he be, he is in contact through his work with the affairs of the world and each time he enters his home, the whole universe follows him. He mingles all day with men and sometimes it seems that he brings

all of them home with him. His wife and children form a circle of silence to listen to this eternal traveler.

What he sought and what he dreamed of in the streets and great thoroughfares of the world, he finds in his home: to sit down, to listen to the humble story of the day gone by, to relax, to forget everything for a moment, and to lay aside the armor he must wear in the world. The little community about him is as closed as a heart. But even here he must think of the problems of tomorrow and once again a frown creases his forehead. He looks at his wife and sees her as the young girl that he took intact from the arms of her parents and wonders if it was for this, for these few brief, interrupted instants, that he pronounced his marriage vows. Did he really give himself? Is he not at every moment an habitual criminal? What, in truth, is the gift of man?

But the wife does not bother herself with such questions. She knows how to wait, and her life, when she looks back over it, was but one long advent now filled to overflowing. She awaited the husband who would one day come, even when she did not yet know him. Now that she knows him better and better each day, it costs her nothing to wait because in truth he never ceases to be where she is. The dialogue of husband and wife cannot be interrupted, even when they are physically separated. She has given herself so totally that he must accept her even when his mind is on something else altogether. Now, wherever he goes, he always feels the weight of her sweet and strengthening presence in his heart. Even when separation lasts for years and gives no promise of ending, it is not so much in an old album that he keeps her faded image, but in his heart as something that is ever fresh and new.

Women often speak, and not without reason, of masculine egoism. But it is their role to conquer it, and they will do so only by the force of love. Why deny that man does not know how to love as woman? That it is not natural for him to give himself as entirely as she does and that, up to a point, it is impossible? This is in no way a privilege but a burden. The true nature of marriage is found forever clarified in the famous sentence of St. Paul: "Man is the glory of God and woman is the glory of man."

Ordained directly by God, man in the world is obliged to work with his hands and his intelligence to prepare creation for the second coming of Christ. These thousand roads of the earth, in the air, and on the waters, these machines, these engines, these philosophies, these constitutions and codes—they are his works which are not necessarily good as are those of God, but which can become so. Whatever man accomplishes, he does not accomplish alone. Just as he needs his wife to propagate the race and perfect the number of the elect, so too does he need her to offer on the altar of the planet this gigantic sacrifice. For, without her, he would be nothing other than a succession of meaningless gestures. We have all met men who have become mere puppets and seem to have lost their soul someplace and cannot recover it. Whoever wishes to accomplish a work that is fruitful must have in him a large measure of vision, patience and prayer.

Such is the role of her who has given herself and cannot take back what she has given. If she has given inner meaning to her husband, if she is, as it were, his soul, he gives her meaning within the framework of the universe, and she thus becomes associated with all of his actions.

What was not given her to do as woman, her husband can do, not in her place, but with her, by her and through her. For the gift of man cannot be other than his work, while the gift of woman is what is within her and indeed what is deepest within her.

Certain imprudent people may well scorn these laws that govern man and wife, but society must respect them at the risk of falling into perfect anarchy. One is astonished to find society falling prey to the error that conjugal love, however reciprocal it may be, is exactly the same both in husband and wife. It is the wife, at once active and contemplative, Martha and Mary, but active within a closed circle, who has chosen the better part. The husband owes whatever honor he has to his wife, but it is his role, and not hers, to sit among the chiefs of his people before the gates of the city. It is thus that the inspired author has described the valiant woman. It is also a conjugal parable that is recounted in the Gospels about the wise and foolish virgins who awaited the spouse not knowing the day or the hour when he would return.

Conjugal love differs from all other love precisely in that it is subject to these imprescriptible laws. Daily routine is its lot, a routine that is sometimes indigent and sometimes painful, but which never excludes either self-communion or enchantment. Here each one is in his place and it is because each has accepted this place once and for all that happiness, as strong and humble as a living plant, comes upon them. The ambition of unhappy lovers is to wish to avoid this routine by breaking through the barriers of time. Christian lovers, on the other hand, have met at some moment in their lives, and it was a prophetic moment in which the whole unknown

future until death unwound before their eyes; they accepted it all in one solemn moment with their eyes shut. They do not dream of prolonging their ecstasy in an impossible immobility, but they make it last through the years like a flame that warms but is never extinguished.

In the intimate moments of their married life, they never fail to see each other with a joy that is ever new. Not that their appearance does not change, but through all of these changes, something strangely immutable remains. Something undecipherable which God bestowed upon them when He created them. When I feel lost in the entanglement of exterior tasks, I have only to turn again to my wife to find myself. For what she loves in me above all is not the works upon which other men judge me; rather it is a mysterious source which I cannot grasp and which she guards in her heart like a buried treasure. "Mary," we read in the Gospel, "pondered all of these things in her heart."

As for her, she is, once and for all, totally forgotten and lost in me. So much so in fact that I must see her through myself in order that she can know of what she is made. We are thus like two mirrors reflecting each other. All of this, I must add in terminating, is not given on our wedding day. It must be built up in great patience and that is why time is altogether indispensable for the growth and development of a Christian marriage. It is, furthermore, never terminated and death interrupts our work without really completing it. Our own strength is indeed far too deficient and only the grace of marriage enables this bond at once spiritual and carnal to germinate into the inexhaustible fruits of unity.

Perfect marriages have no other history than that of happy people and for the same reasons. It is the secret

of the King which must not be revealed. But it suffices to know that it exists, that souls of good will set out in its pursuit and we can assure them that they would not seek it had they not already found it.

CHAPTER III

Unity in Marriage

Interceding with His Father, Christ implored Him that men be one even as the Trinity is one. Unity then would be absolute perfection, the culminating point of all the perfections that are proposed to us—unity of creatures among themselves and of their community with the Creator.

It seems that an image of this perfect conjunction is recognizable in the conjugal bond, the most binding and the most unifying that we can conceive. It is an image of unity, a call to unity, a pressing invitation of God to men to be one with themselves and with Him, to let their fraternal love fuse with divine love, to be admitted one day to the fullness of supreme unity.

It has been said that *unity* is a divine dream and *union* a human dream. In reality, all human dreams are the first faltering steps, humbly conscious of their limits, of a divine aspiration, a tentative beginning, a departure in the right direction.

When we consider our world, the unity Christ prayed for seems to be of the celestial order. But it implies immediate consequences that are of the earth. No state of life appears more marked with their imprint than marriage. For no state of life recalls so insistently to man closed in upon himself by sin that, saved by Christ, he must, day after day, break through the barrier of his ego by means of love of others to begin his pilgrimage towards the liberation that will one day mark his entry into the unity of life.

Called by God to eternal life, to the perfection of unity, we are therefore called as of now to the perfection of union which leads to it. There is no discontinuity between the two, and to realize union is already to answer, within our present limits, His call to unity.

It is in this perspective that conjugal union appears so magnificent, so pleasing to God, and truly, the seed of eternity. The first words of the Introit of the Nuptial Mass are: "May the God of Israel unite you." This union is perfectly and totally orientated towards God. What is proposed here is a union of love founded on Him and glorifying Him by *what it is* and *what it accomplishes*.

Love is the one force in the world most capable of uniting two persons and added to it are the powerful forces of the sacrament which sustain and fortify it. Yet in every home contrary elements work against both love and grace. That is why everything in our personalities and in our lives must fall under the marriage contract. Then the disintegrating powers can be resisted with the growing strength of a living "we" which gradually replaces two "I's," so much weaker against temptations.

Nevertheless the "we" can also know temptations.

They have as sources the egoism of two people who refuse to open themselves to others; the abdication of one of the spouses before the other and his absorption by the other; the dissolution of two personalities into a fainthearted "we."

We are not forgetting that it is here a question of a union between two complementary persons, a union far richer than that of two similar persons, since each must fill up what is lacking in the other and not merely duplicate. It is richer and also more difficult. Such a union demands more than an adaption; it demands a harmonization on all levels of masculine and feminine personalities so different and often, in many respects, so conflicting.

On all levels—the harmonious accord of two beings and two lives can neglect nothing. It supposes the union of activities, of bodies, of characters, of hearts, of sensibilities, of intelligences and of souls.

It is not enough to envisage such a union, to desire it, or to dream imaginatively of its beauty. We should will it and effect it. If so many marriages are not really unions, it is because we expect everything from love and from the sacrament, forgetting that the most abundant graces are helpless without our sincere and active good will.

What we must wish and effect is the common pooling of our whole being and of our whole life. To refuse to do so is to sin against love, and, in a concrete case, the only justification of such a refusal is that the pooling might go against the will of God.

We may as well admit that there are numerous more or less conscious ways of cheating.

—To try to pool everything in common through an egoistic will of independence, is to cheat.

—To reserve a secret garden to which you have decided that your partner will have no access, and to make no effort to render your whole life communicable, is to cheat.

—To desire not to live together spiritually, is to cheat.

—Not to interest yourself in the whole life of the other, inside and outside the home, is to cheat.

—Not to respect and favor everything that the other holds dear, is to cheat; to no longer need the other, is to cheat.

—Not to remain oneself, to abdicate one's personality or renounce one's personal life through a false notion of submission or to have peace, is also to cheat, for then we would be giving only a pale reflection of ourselves to the other instead of a life and a richness which would develop and complete him: being no longer anything, we have nothing to give.

In what then does union consist? To realize it fully, we must prefer the bond of love in reciprocal dependence—the opening and offering of our life to another—to our personal independence.

—We must make our partner participate in our whole life and to render it communicable to the other in every possible manner.

—We must be attentive to the needs of the other.

—We must apply ourselves together to perfect a common work.

This total union is to be realized in spite of the disintegrating forces exerted against it. Their common source

is self-love—so contrary to real love—with which original sin has impregnated us and which actual sin in all of its forms aggravates still more. Apathy and routine impede us from actively desiring union; it suggests a thousand and one bad or insufficient reasons to put off or elude such a change of attitude, such an effort towards more confidence and frankness. A proud inflexibility then replaces the humble suppleness of the first love which made the heart unattached and rendered it capable of understanding another heart—its thoughts, desires and sentiments, however removed they might be from one's own. And it sometimes happens that certain real conflicts of taste or character seem to set indomitable obstacles in the path of union.

Conjugal union must be understood as a conquest to be attempted again and again. For far stronger than the enemy forces, love and grace will come to our rescue; with such allies we have no right to despair.

Perhaps the essential quality of that initial love, in virtue of which two people choose one another, determines in part the degree of union that is possible for each marriage to reach. But we must not pretend that we cannot go beyond such limits: when grace is operative, it uses even what appears to obstruct it and responds magnanimously to the humblest of good wills.

Briefly, and as a theme of meditation that each couple should study in keeping with the grace accorded it, let us consider this moral and spiritual union in its different aspects.

Let us recall here that this union will only be fruitful if each personal life is rich and is continually enriching itself; if the efforts of two personal lives fructify in a common work; and finally if this collaboration reflects

back upon the personal life of each, conditioning it and enriching it. Thus the whole sweep of married life is magnificently unified.

Union of Activities

Evasions are most contrary to such unity. They can range from a personal activity that becomes a manifestation, more or less conscious, of independence, to the absence of any deep communal life.

While there is an independence that is harmful to unity, there is another, perhaps exteriorly similar, that is entirely different and aids the development of each personality. This latter appears singularly apt to harmonize the different roles of husband and wife. Can we not say that to renounce all personal initiative under the guise of submitting totally to that of the other, is a kind of devaluation, a loss to our personal life which conditions our common life, and therefore a deception?

If a certain kind of independence is good, an absence of interest in our personal activities is not. Our activity is part of ourselves; it conditions very deeply what we are and what we are striving towards. To be disinterested in our activity is tantamount to being disinterested in ourselves.

For the same reason, an arbitrary elimination of the other party from our activity is also to refuse oneself. Disinterestedness that excludes a part of ourselves or our lives from the common goal of marriage is a refusal to work together and lays the foundation for serious divergences in our lives.

The effective collaboration of married couples in their proper activities is common today. Those who have

practiced it know what a bond of unity it can be; but to be unifying and truly fruitful, it must be born of circumstances that imply mutual self-giving. There is no rule more common or more certain than the harmonization in the home of the activities of husband and wife.

Union of Bodies

This union reveals the essential characteristics of all unity. Because it rests upon an indisputable state of things, we can refer to it to understand the value, in any union, of complementary diversity, of the leadership of the man over the woman, of the joyful and living submission of the woman in whom passivity would be an absence of life. Passivity would be a submission deceptive to the husband and without any positive influence on the profound harmony of their personalities. The reality of the marriage act is concrete evidence of this. Let us note also that the child, the concrete and perfect fruit of this common ideal, guarantees still further benefits.

Marriage then appears to us as the most human union in the world; the only union that is fully so, because in it no element is foreign to the other. Here, moreover, are established the closest possible bonds between domains reputed to be foreign or even opposed to each other. Far from conflicting, they reinforce one another mutually. Granted the absence of sin, which falsifies everything, this reinforcement goes beyond any expression we can give of it.

Children of God have always known and experienced that the union of their bodies can be a powerful aid to the union of their hearts and souls! Contrary to certain negative suspicions in regard to the nobility of this act,

married couples must place every confidence in it. It brings with it abundant graces of union. Here they renew the enthusiasm of their "yes."

Respect for this implies, among other things, for the husband as well as the wife, a desire to please the other on the plane of physical attraction by a concern for bodily hygiene. This preoccupation is not a purposeless luxury, but concurs in the common realization of the masterpiece that is a complete union in love of one's whole being with that of another.

Union of Characters

Upon this depends the harmony, joy and peace of the home.

For characters are also complementary. There are evident psychological differences between man and woman; there are, in addition, differences that issue from diverse educations and backgrounds. It is important to be fully cognizant of these differences. For marital harmony is realized out of the raw materials of divergent notes of character. We should bear in mind that it is never a question of becoming identical; it is rather a question of accord.

Does this include defects of character as well? Certainly. In the work of harmonizing our marriage we cannot forget that our characters are sinful and the common accord of our lives must take into account our contrarities and imperfections.

To love someone is to love that person as he is and not as we would like him to be. We are under no obligation to love his faults, but we must love him enough that his faults will not set up enmity between us. The com-

mon unity of our marriage will then, far from constituting an amorous cultivation of reciprocal faults, enable us to know and diminish them.

This can be done through a deep and profound collaboration which we will discuss in more detail apropos of the union of souls. It seems that we sense in this connection the intervention of paternal and maternal love—so strong in both man and woman that the husband's paternity in relation to his wife, and conversely, the woman's maternity in relation to the husband must be considered profoundly allied to their conjugal love.

But these mutual faults, even though they diminish, will not always be overcome immediately. Due to the psychological differences between man and woman, even defects of character can frequently become the basis of harmony. One efficacious means of keeping peace in the home is to cultivate the antidote of the other's faults: calmness and patience, for example, if the other conspicuously lacks these virtues. This practice will help the other partner acquire what he does not have (the educative influence of daily example needs no demonstration) and contribute to the maintenance of the equilibrium in a home.

Union of Hearts

Numerous nuances differentiate the love of a man from that of a woman. Neither can expect to be loved as he or she loves.

Man wants to protect, to lead the woman he loves. He reveals himself more the conqueror in love than the receiver; yet he has an immense need of woman. Woman offers herself to the man she loves. She needs, above all,

to be necessary and submissive to him. To be no longer necessary, is a kind of death. Her love restores and appeases man. She wants to give and to give herself; she wants to be received by man that her love might be a food to him. These are perhaps the general and habitual differences, visibly complementary, between their two manners of loving. There are certain other differences which lead to the false belief that one loves less than the other. It is a belief that leads one to suffer from what appears a lack of love, while the other suspects a kind of deception, a reproach which he cannot understand and which appears to him unjust.

We must at all costs abstain from this secret censure which separates hearts. Frequently this subtle separation takes place without the knowledge of one party until the day he realizes with great sorrow that the other has strayed far from their common ideal and permanently destroyed the unity of their marriage.

Perfection here consists in refraining from all reproaches; if this proves impossible, if every effort to reason away a suspected deception fails, then the only solution is total frankness with each other. It is always better to express our thoughts in these matters as soon as possible. Such openness is relatively easy provided it is done without bitterness or egoism or a spirit of re-vindication, but with love—in view of a greater Love.

Happiness contributes greatly to the unity of marriage. So too, in a still deeper sense, does suffering. A few years of marriage is sufficient to teach us to what point the suffering lived by two people cements their union and how, by a return to grace, this union helps them bear their suffering and offer it to God. Two weaknesses then become an astonishing strength.

It is especially in the common love of children that the union of hearts is established, just as it is especially in the maturity of later years that it will reach completion.

Union of Tastes and Sensibilities

This union invites us to exchanges which are, in the home, sources of multiple joys. The tastes of one are added to those of another to complete them. These are so many new ways of seeing, feeling and understanding persons and things that married couples can communicate to each other.

They can do this easily for nothing is more communicable or even more communicative than tastes (or differences of taste), than impressions and sentiments—understood in the sense that we say certain people, more than others, have a taste for beauty.

Must we again mention the serious incomprehensions encountered here? Our guiding principle should be not to insist upon sharing our personal sentiments with the other, but rather to seek out what we enjoy together. The young Beethoven used to say, when he began to compose: "I'm looking for notes that like each other." We must always try to pick out these notes with a light finger and, when they are struck, they frequently call forth others.

Innumerable fields of action are offered to the common sharing of tastes and sensibilities.

The choice of friends and their welcome in the home seems to be of this order—a common joy in meeting enriching personalities, in kind attention to others, in a constant concern to make them feel welcome, in the de-

sire to understand them, to help them and to open oneself to whatever they can bring to our home. In this manner we soon feel that it is the heart of the home that is attractive to others, that it is our common welcome much more than the individual affection shown by either the husband or wife.

To share our past also responds to an ardent desire of love. It is to relive for the other the atmosphere of our childhood, the people we loved then and draw forth a new evocation of the other's past. Actually, the past then becomes the present, not only in our memories, but also in the way we act, in our tastes and in our personalities. It is a part of ourselves to which the other has a right. For henceforward our lives are one, in their origins as well as in their development.

Union of Wills

Marriage is two strengths, two wills joined in the service of each other, the service of their community, the service of their neighbor and the service of God.

This ideal can be achieved much better if husband and wife are united and not isolated; if they are in agreement on the essential points and then, in the measure of the grace that is given to them and depending upon circumstances, on the secondary ends; and if they are capable of harmonizing their means to this common end.

The essential accord here resides in a common objective. The end we pursue makes us what we are. We become the person of our objective.

Ideally, man's will, clear-cut and enterprising, seems to be that of a leader who pursues his objective logically, overcomes all obstacles in the way and dominates them

one by one. Woman's will, marked by an intuitive and tenacious sense of direction (what might be called sweet stubbornness) obeys the directives which her heart dictates. The genius of her will is expressed in an intuition of the best tactics to adopt towards herself and others, whether it be a question of personal development, of love, of running the home or the education of the children.

Harmony, if it were always thus, would be simple to realize. Practically speaking, however, one of the couple is almost always more energetic than the other. Whence the danger of one's absorbing the other! If one partner has a dominating will, he should guard against crushing the other's personality, an unfortunate phenomenon in many a home.

On the other hand, the more energetic of the two should sometimes come to the aid of the other's will, making up for what it lacks by adroitly and educatively playing the role of a lever.

Also, every strong personality has its weak points. It can be frequently noticed in some homes where the husband manifests a vitality and spirit of enterprise which makes the wife appear apathetic, that this same woman becomes the rock in matters of faith and devotion and Christian morals, and the husband is but the moving sand.

This example should alert us to the danger of one of the parties abdicating before the commanding attitude of the other. For in the hour when the stronger of the two weakens, how shall the other come to his rescue and become his guide if her personality has meanwhile dissolved?

Union of Intelligences

Here again it is not a question of imitation but of completing each other. Masculine and feminine intelligences differ by their structures as they do by their methods of thought.

They are nevertheless called to enrich each other that their vision and comprehension of the world be more adequate.

Neither man nor woman has the right to become isolated in his or her "speciality" of thought; but, having thought first of all alone, they must share their intellectual discoveries. A warm life of the spirit is born of such exchanges. That is why, on this plane more than on others, it is important that each cultivate his personal life—developing it with the view of a fertile common life; enriching it that each might bring to his partner something of the treasure he has found.

A common intellectual activity seems an excellent means to orientate this exchange. Some homes recommend reading together; others prefer to exchange views on the same book read separately. But books or the theatre are by no means the only nourishment of the mind. The intelligence must be nourished on everything. A varied intellectual life through the communion of two minds is certainly essential if the home is to be alive and if the children are to be nourished on the same spiritual plane.

To realize the last part of this common task parents must resolve to consecrate some time to it, to choose their means with care and to make the effort of adapting their knowledge to the different degrees of intelligence growing in their home. For practical purposes it would

be effective to take advantage of parties and meals for this work of adaption; in this manner the boredom of ordinary conversation is avoided and those gathered about receive food for the mind as well as food for the body.

To the end of developing a common life of the spirit, artistically and intellectually, some homes perform certain material duties together. They thus obviate that rigorous partitioning of family activities which permits some to consecrate themselves to intellectual pursuits while others—usually the wife and older daughter—are totally excluded.

Union of Souls

Let us first of all insist upon the importance of *a personal life* in this respect. The primordial duty of a creature can be summed up by this threefold rule: God must be known, loved and served first!

Our union with God cannot therefore be subordinated to our conjugal love. This love is dependent upon the life of the soul and its union with God.

Each partner ought therefore to reserve certain moments of quiet with God—moments of heart to heart prayer in which the other partner is not the first pre-occupation. At this point one partner has no need of the other to benefit by his prayer, for here the union of souls takes the full meaning of “communion of saints.”

Our imperious vocation is above all that sanctity which bears the beautiful name of union with God: the sanctity of our souls first, then the sanctity of our marriage. We must desire not only union of God with our souls, but also union of God with our union itself, with

the "we" consecrated on our wedding day and the family that is born of this love.

Thus an indispensable personal life of the soul with God, far from excluding, fosters that common pooling which realizes the integral union of husband and wife and the union of their family with God. Their communion of soul is precisely what interiorly animates their life on all levels; it is the soul of their union.

Husbands and wives must give God to each other, just as in the marriage ceremony they are mutually ministers of grace. Let them therefore know God together, ask His blessing on their home, adore together, ask pardon for their sins together, offer each other to God and offer their happiness and their suffering together.

Must all spiritual initiative be shared thus? Should husband and wife have the same spiritual director, make a common mediation, examination of conscience and confession of faults? It is up to each couple to answer these questions as they see fit. They remain particular cases determined largely by the special vocation of each home. Suffice it to recall that there are sins of silence—silences which corrupt and kill love and others which simply leave it in a state of mediocrity.

On the level of union of souls, the immediate common work seems to be to make God known, to interest others (primarily our children) in the living God who enlightens every marriage.

In conclusion, let us "come back to earth" by recalling the practicality of gradually realizing this complete union.

If conjugal love, of itself, tends towards union, if it is a power of unity at work, then husbands and wives must collaborate actively with this unifying force. They

should do it in the enthusiasm of a living hope and, in difficult moments, with the perseverance of true charity. And always in the faith that God Himself is at work in the heart of that love which is totally offered to Him. Could we but believe with conviction that since God wills our union, He will spare no pains to realize it! His sacrament utilizes everything with an ingenuity that is frequently surprising in order to make the union of husband and wife more sure and more total.

In the last analysis, this essential collaboration towards conjugal union is for the glory of God.

It is to give Him glory by what it *is*: by the masterpiece that is the perfection of love, by the image of God that is this "we" composed of two creatures who love each other and by their love journey towards eternity.

It is to give Him glory by what it *accomplishes*: the primary effect which is the child, the fruit of "us," an image in its turn of divine fruitfulness, the soul of eternal praise which is as an instrument which we must tune and then offer to the Holy Spirit that He might draw from it a canticle of glory.

PART II

TWO IN ONE FLESH

THE PERSONALITY OF WOMAN

THE MAN AS FATHER

LIFE THROUGH LOVE

THE FLESH AND THE SPIRIT

CHAPTER IV

The Personality of Woman

Between Two Worlds

We can define the essential traits of woman's personality by comparing her with man.

This comparison is not intended as another of the many more or less ingenious psychological parallels that have been published in recent years, but rather purports to show how the two personalities complete and call forth one another.

Without going into cumbersome details, we can make the general statement that woman occupies two worlds: one above man, the other below him. From one point of view she is closer to nature; from another, she is more sensitive to spiritual realities. In one sense she is more carnal; in another, she is more mystical.

When we speak of woman being closer to nature we mean that by her functional role in passing on life (in the biological and cosmic sense of the word), she participates in the great rhythm of creation. Made for child-

bearing, she is spontaneously in accord with all the mysteries of fruitfulness in nature. Humanity has always been more or less aware of this because the great religious rites and myths have traditionally associated the cult of woman with that of nature, with the earth, with Cybele. The mother-goddess has always presided over the great life force and through her, life has manifested itself under the sign of womanhood.

Woman depends on her body and her body depends on the universe; her sex pervades her entire organism and through her sex the rhythm of the seasons, the days and the months are inscribed in her body. The maternal instinct, however spiritualized it becomes, always remains profoundly marked by the unconscious memory of the uterine life of the child. Indeed the whole woman—her instincts and her manner of acting—bears this mark of an alliance with life, with the great forces in nature.

This affective participation in the cosmos is something quite foreign to man. For him, the universe is an object of science and action. It is something to be studied and conquered. Man's relation to nature is more an intellectual one and demands a certain objectivity and thence a certain exteriority in relation to the object. A mystical identification with the world and an affective participation in the forces of nature are, from the masculine point of view, a poor means of understanding and dominating it.

The other pole of woman's personality is mystical. By that we mean she is more spontaneously attentive and sensitive to values that cannot be measured in immediate results. She perceives in the world and in herself undercurrents, presences, symbols and voices. What man attains to only through his imagination or by virtue of

prolonged and laborious research, she senses instinctively. And the most generous and disinterested virtues of woman—love, goodness, pity, solicitude, protection—are generally her response to these invisible signs which she feels are addressed to her personally. At the extreme point of this mystical vocation of woman, we find her specific religious role: quicker than man, woman interprets the will of God; quicker than he, she responds to it with her whole being.

Being both carnal and mystical woman's nature would seem to suffer a dichotomy. But we must not imagine a greater distance between these two poles than actually exists. Better adapted to the living rhythm of things, woman is better able to see in them their inherent spirituality, the presence of the invisible in the visible. When she watches a person, for example, she is more attentive than man to details of expression and the subtle contrasts and undertones of moods; at the same time she is equipped to interpret these manifestations of personality in their deepest spiritual sense. This type of intuition, to which are joined woman's physical gifts and spiritual insight, is evidence that the two poles of her personality are but two aspects of one and the same reality.

The double gift which she enjoys explains both why woman often irritates man and why he needs her. There is in man a natural distrust of any kind of knowledge or action that lies outside the domain of logic and reason: both of that knowledge which is below reason such as the sense and instinct and that which is above reason such as intuition and revelation. He fears both too little light and too much light; he rejects any power that would demand his consent before he has reflected and decided for himself. By nature man is rational even when he is

capable of immediate sensation; woman is instinct and intuition even when she is capable of formulating logical judgments.

This distinction is not absolute; but it is valid and explains the conflicts that arise between man and woman. It also explains their reciprocal need for each other. By her tendency to the concrete, the individual, the existential, the here and now, woman can exert a curative influence over man's algebraic intellectualism which is often a mockery of reality; by her instinctive recognition of gratuitous and disinterested values she can steer him away from the masculine superstition of efficiency. Man in his turn, with the balancing effect of the power of clear reasoning and ordered action, can protect her from the danger of useless daydreaming and erratic impulses.

Another way of putting this truth is to say that man is more of time and woman more of eternity. Man's energy is expended in the concrete order of history and progress whose artisan he is; woman is more interested in the unchanging spiritual values that underlie all temporal values. Whence the impression woman often gives of stagnation and immobility; whence also her character of refuge, of a harbor of peace. Man comes to rest in her, to find himself again and take new strength after his conquests or before his new departures. The old myth of Antaeus, son of the Earth, illustrates this well. So does that of Penelope. While Ulysses is adventuring abroad, Penelope awaits and prepares his return. She follows him in thought and in spirit and even appears to him in a dream; for wherever she establishes herself, in the center of all, she is his refuge of peace.

It should be noted that these different and comple-

mentary aspects of man and woman which are admirably realized in marriage are not realized only in marriage. They exist wherever men and women meet and collaborate, in work and friendship as in love. Nor are these qualities exclusively masculine or feminine; some of each are to be found in both. The most virile of men has in his character some feminine elements, although they are often smothered and atrophied beyond recognition. It is through contact with woman that he will become conscious of them and fructify them. Thus woman, who gives to man a new vision of the world, also gives him a better understanding of himself.

The Wife-Mother

Woman then stands at the frontiers of two worlds or two lives: the world of biological and cosmic life and the world of mystical and spiritual life. But these two worlds do not become clearly distinguishable until woman is called (in the most personal sense of that word) to give herself. The primordial quality of woman's personality is that she is made to give herself.

This is also true of man. Like woman he too must give himself in order to possess himself. One of the fundamental accomplishments of modern philosophy is to have shown the interaction necessary to the possession of self and the gift of self. "One cannot give what one does not have" as the old adage has it. The reverse is also true: we cannot really possess what we have until we have given it. But between the self-giving of man and woman there is a profound difference. Man can give himself to an idea, to a cause, to a collectivity; spontaneously, woman can give herself only to a person. Insofar

as she is open to the call of a living voice, to the distress of an individual, she is firmly indifferent to the abstract and collective.

This carries over into the spiritual order. Man's vocation before God is above all a mission of fulfilling, of completing the work of the redemption; woman experiences primarily a personal relationship with God. She too is called to perfect the kingdom of God on earth. But her attention is centered more on God than on the kingdom. She accomplishes her work more through personal love.

This individuality of woman's gift is the salient trait of her love. More precisely her gift is love.

A young girl can meet a man, even many men, and display her charms without engaging any essential part of herself. But as soon as she hears a voice saying to her: "I need you" then she gives herself entirely. In this precise moment she becomes conscious of the worlds she carries within her and offers them to this mendicant. Then she becomes a wife.

Throughout her life, her love will keep this personal note; it will always be directed towards an individual. There is here a risk that she ensnare her husband in a closed circle. But this risk is not inevitable since a woman who marries a man, marries the whole man with his mission of fulfillment and the work he has to do. We often see the metamorphosis of a woman who before marriage limits her ideals to the family, to the narrow world of her relatives and her dreams. Once she is married she no longer desires anything for herself, but everything for her husband. She becomes ambitious, untiring and insatiable. Her husband cannot do enough; he cannot be generous or active enough. Each evening when he comes

home from a tiring day's work, he finds in his wife not only relief from his fatigue but also inspiration to begin again on the morrow.

Her mission is to have no mission other than that of her husband; she must believe in his mission often with more conviction and for a longer period of time than he does himself. She is his collaborator not because she does the same kind of work as he but because she rewinds the spring and gives him confidence in himself and his work. It is in this very deep sense that we must understand the hierarchy of man and woman in marriage. Woman is subordinate to man because she is dedicated to his creative work and because in him and by him she fulfills her own personality and accomplishes her own mission. It is thus that she understands marriage. It is thus that she lives her maternity.

It is often said that woman is made to be a wife and mother. But why separate these two functions? It would be better to say that woman is made to be a wife-mother. For even though there be several objects of her love, there is only one love. To bear the children of her husband is still to love and serve him; it is to accomplish with him a creative work in the fullest and most divine sense of that word "creation." A woman who separates herself from her husband to give more attention to her children is probably not a good educator; she gives her children only a part of her conjugal love, and then appear the troubles and complexes between mother and child that modern psychoanalysis has uncovered. Conjugal love is not merely a compensating element of maternal love, but a living source: conjugal love alone gives birth to children and nourishes them spiritually until their personalities have matured.

There is this similarity between conjugal love and maternal love: a wife, before she has any children (and even afterwards) has served her apprenticeship to motherhood with her husband. This is true not because she pampers him—or mothers him in the pejorative sense of that word (which would be to minister to his childhood instincts) but because she pushes him towards a mature personality; because she helps him attain to this dignity of a “person” that is developed, free and consecrated to God. This “conjugal maternity” inspires and orientates, more or less consciously, woman’s own maternity. If she were only a mother to her children, she would run the risk of keeping them always dependent upon her and thus prevent their growing up. If, on the other hand, she is a “wife-mother” she looks beyond the present instant and gradually inculcates in her children that interior liberty which renders them capable of making their own decisions and of choosing a state of life rather than submitting to one. In other words she does for her children (in a different way perhaps, but the difference matters little here) exactly what she does for her husband.

It would therefore be absurd to separate, still more so to oppose, the roles of woman as mother and as wife. Both are necessary for woman to fulfill her personality and her destiny; both are realized in the personal and intimate gift which she makes of herself and without which she is in danger of falling into a way of life without any real roots or attachments. Such may be a life of freedom, but a freedom that is solitary, sterile and hopeless.

Let us add that the wife-mother does not limit her influence to her family circle. This is a temptation to which many women succumb. On the contrary, the

married woman has an indispensable social role. Balanced and mature, she is more apt than the celibate to exercise a good influence for she exercises it in the capacity of a wife-mother. The qualities and virtues which she develops in her family are precisely those which she can give and which the world needs. It is impossible, and useless, to enumerate the number of things she can do. As long as she does not compete with man, her sense of non-material values (beauty, interior life, and sacrifice), her intuition of the mystery of things and persons, her intelligence and her love of children, the weak, the persecuted, the guilty and unwanted—everything that was only in germ when she was a girl—will develop one hundredfold and seek only diffusion.

Courage is needed for this kind of vocation. Too many women think that their mission ends within the frontiers of their home; they say they *cannot* do more. In reality, they do not *believe* that they can do more. If they believed, they could. They have only to make the effort to discover that their family life, instead of suffering, will take on new meaning and that their personalities, instead of becoming more dispersed, will become more centered. The wife-mother is a complete woman. Such a woman can give everything to the world; such a woman the world needs.

The Mystical Symbolism of Woman

Woman's contribution to humanity and to man in particular is immense. She reveals and communicates to him experience of a twofold world with which he is, by nature, less familiar: the world which lies above and the world which lies below reason. She gives herself to man

to become the wife-mother and thus radiates concentric waves of love and life in her home. This presence of woman to the world and to man is a source of exceptionally rich meditation.

However, woman cannot be fully understood in a purely human perspective. It must be extended to include God. Studying the wife-mother in her relations to man, we gain a deeper understanding of the relations between humanity and God. This mission is less obvious, but it is not less real; perhaps it is more real. To understand it we must penetrate beyond the merely superficial; we must have something of that Baudelairean insight which divines the signs and symbols beyond familiar appearances. What is needed, in a word, is an "evangelical" outlook that discovers the deep spiritual parables beneath the prosaic events of daily life. In woman are silhouetted the great shadows whose invisible presence we can suspect only through her.

Thus Beauty, and Love, over and above the creatures in whom they are incarnate, evoke in us a world that lies beyond the ken of the terrestrial. For this reason man not only desires to know woman but dreams about her. It is as though her presence awakens in us a nostalgia that carries us beyond her physical beauty and her loving heart and puts us in contact with a higher beauty and another heart. The charms and physical graces of woman are like signs that are reflections and reminders of their prototypes in heaven. Hence woman is a great source of hope for some and a lamentable deception for others, depending upon whether or not this quality of the infinite is sought in her.

For Christians, the Woman-Symbol takes on a very specific sense when considered in the light of faith.

As wife, woman is offering and abandon; as mother, she welcomes the gift of man and renders it fruitful. Woman's relationship to man is an exact parallel of humanity's relationship to God. For what is sanctity but giving ourselves to God and fructifying the talents he has given us? This explains why in the Bible the themes of marriage and love are charged with such tremendous religious symbolism. The chosen people of Israel were considered as the bride of God by the inspired writer. God Himself is always presented as a husband, sometimes loved, sometimes betrayed, but always loving. When St. Paul used the marriage symbol to describe the relations between Christ and His Church, he was but re-echoing the profound religious meaning of woman's relationship to the man she loves.

This symbolism is not only valid in a collective and universal sense but it also expresses the inner mystery of each individual soul. Woman not only represents humanity before God but each soul before God.

The Christian religion is a gradual approach to God. Anyone who wishes to practice this religion must learn to offer himself to God as woman offers herself to her husband—with joyful submission, total openness, and active dependence. He must also give birth in his soul to the grace of God as a mother conceives a child; he must nurture it, translate it into an effective effort towards extending the Kingdom of God. There is no better symbol than that of the wife and mother, the wife-mother, to qualify the attitude of mankind before God. For this reason the mystical symbolism of woman is closely allied to the greater symbolism of Mary and the Church, both of whom are wife and mother par excellence.

Thus woman is more at home in the sphere of reli-

gious values; she is more naturally religious. From her husband to God, from human love to divine love, the nature of woman is the same. In both cases she is greatly aided by the spontaneous impulse of her personality. Man on the contrary must in a certain sense double back on himself. His vocation is one of decision, of undertaking, of realization, of leading. In his religious practice he must do something of an about-face and learn submission, humility and dependence. Once he has done this he will find that his own specifically masculine qualities are greatly enriched. But at first the effort required appears odiously contrary to his nature. It is precisely here that the providential intervention of woman can help him. He can find inspiration in her example and conform himself to her image. This docile, impregnable presence of woman by his side can put him quite effortlessly on the road to God. There is no more beautiful spiritual lesson a wife can give her husband.

Let us add that a man who penetrates far enough into the heart of his wife to become identical with her in her offering to Christ will make another discovery: that of God Himself, or more precisely, of an essential aspect of God. Here we have woman in another great symbolic role: that of God-Mother. "Does a mother forget her first born? Neither will I forget you" (Jer. 31:3); "As a mother consoles her child, so I will console you" (Is. 66:13). God envelops us and protects us; He watches over us and forgives us; He pours out special blessings upon the little ones, the poor, the downtrodden. All of that is maternal. It has been said of God: "Nobody is so much a father"; it would be equally correct to say: "Nobody is so much a mother."

Man represents to the eyes of the world the paternal

love of God. But woman has the mission of revealing that God's love is also maternal.

It was not by chance that God delegated a woman to watch over us until the end of time, a woman who is a mother: His Mother! She is charged with reminding us of the maternity of God; in conscious or unconscious union with her, every woman in the maternity of her heart (which goes far beyond the limits of mere carnal motherhood) carries into every age a living proof of that reality.

Eve and the Serpent

Such is the mystery of woman: a mystery of light, but also a mystery of shadow. For through woman sin has entered the world and through her it continues to prowl about. Undoubtedly men sin; but the sin of woman is perhaps more insidious and more enveloping. Not to evoke this aspect of her nature would be to give an incomplete picture of woman.

There is a temptation to say that sin weakens and darkens feminine charms. That is not necessarily true. A woman in sin remains attractive and fascinating; she still retains a power that is more than human. But everything in her that should normally lead mankind upwards, now drags him towards the depths.

The essential and fundamental sin of woman is the refusal of her femininity! We have already called attention to the two principal aspects of her personality: on the one hand, she carries within her a world of extraordinary richness; on the other, she is made to give herself totally. When she ceases to balance these two tendencies and confines herself to a cult of self or gives herself without control—in both of these cases she is lost.

The woman who says "no" to her inner personality, to her dignity of woman, corrupts everything she touches. For her instinct of self-sacrifice then works in reverse and pushes her to become not only man's slave but his accomplice; she espouses and flatters his most mediocre instincts and encourages him in sin. There is a kind of feminine wantonness, a flattering and seductive coquetry that the strongest of men sometimes succumb to.

But this type of sin interests us less here than the other, what we might call the more noble sin of obduracy: the sin of a woman who feels the call of self-immolation within her but refuses to answer that call. This is no mere sin or weakness or rejection of feminine responsibility. It is a refusal of her very condition of woman. Above all it is a refusal of man, of what she mistakenly thinks is despotism in man whereas in reality it is support, love and protection for her. If she marries, she keeps her independence or imposes her will—often enough by a ruse of weakness that is her infallible trump and a cheap imitation of the enticing duplicity of her sister, the slave. They decidedly do not want children. I often think of one pregnant woman of my acquaintance who spoke severely of her "cancer." Even if she has children she brings them up as she pleases, frequently taking their destiny in her own hands.

A woman who refuses to be a woman is of no use either to her home, the world or God. She does not give to her home the radiance of her strength, her peace or her inspiration; she does not give that spiritual fecundity of a wife-mother that is so essential. She does not contribute to the world those values of goodness, piety and warmth of heart without which there can be no real human relations; above all, she does not express the reve-

lation and the rich symbolism of a humanity that is open and receptive to the gift of God. That is why, by the same refusal, she no longer gives to God what He expects of her. If woman symbolizes, as Gertrude von le Fort has said, "all the power of offering in the universe," then God can only find in a woman closed in upon herself a world closed to His love. The litany calls Mary the "gate of heaven." The symbolism of the door is expressive, for woman is the door of heaven; if she is closed there is no longer a door between the world and God, nor between God and the world.

Thus a world without woman is not a human world. We can judge civilizations on their attitude towards woman. If she is not present, we may be sure that cynicism, bad faith, pride and cruelty prevail in society. A premium is set on politics, technology and economics. It is, of course, quite probable that woman will be displayed on the screen and in popular magazines. But what kind of woman? The star, the pin-up and a whole parade of women who no longer give anything but their empty bodies, their impersonal sex. This is the selfish woman, the woman who adores herself and seeks to be adored; but this adoration is a cult of mockery of which, in the end, she herself is the victim. All trace of the woman who bears the signs of grace and love is banished.

The sin of woman has any number of ramifications. Refusing her beautiful gift of dedication, hardening in the cult of herself, she lets the world slowly desiccate in pride and ultimately in despair. And what is so terrible in all of this is that she still retains her power of fascination that excites men and secretly seduces them. This is a road that leads nowhere for the door that should open upon God is closed.

I wonder whether women who are most convinced of their powers and most intoxicated with their beauty, reflect upon the immense hope they raise in the heart of a man and the immense despair into which they can plunge him? Here again I quote Gertrude von le Fort: "Eve is never the power of evil in itself. The fallen angel exceeds her in revolt, and the devil is masculine; but she shares his power of seduction. Seduction is self-will, the opposite to surrender." That is the real sin of woman.

Nevertheless, in this matter of sin, woman is not alone to blame. Man is also responsible. The image he has made of woman is an idol of sin. And women, who often see themselves through the eyes of men, strive to resemble that image. Let us not be too quick to cast stones at her. If woman must refashion a true concept of her personality and of her mission, this "conversion" does not depend less on man. He must cease imprisoning her in an inferior world of domestic duties. He must see something more in her than her makeup and figure and begin to believe in her personality. He must have confidence in her dignity and solicit her inspiration, make her his companion and his equal in society. Then we would quickly change the course of our civilization from perdition to redemption.

The mystery of woman illumines history—and particularly the religious history of mankind. The Bible indicates this when it recounts the roles of Eve and Mary. Woman is not called upon to act, to be seen or to give orders. It suffices that, in the penumbra, she attract and inspire. She is given to man as the earth that nourishes him, as the air he breathes, as the distant light that is perhaps a dawn. All of history, in which the spiritual

destiny of man is worked out, is made of this antagonism or of this alliance between feminine and masculine values. If they are in conflict, if one wishes to conquer and stifle the other, human progress falters over the brink of disaster. If they are joined in harmony, there is a chance for grace to triumph.

Thus woman stands both in and above history as the great sign of perdition or redemption. In the manner that she sees herself, and that man sees her, we can judge whether God is present or absent from the world.

Such is her mystery; and it is essentially a religious mystery even when we are not aware of it. When we examine her personality, her mission and her symbolism we come closer to God and His love. Henceforward we hold one of the keys to the human condition. With woman, the world is a country of deep springs teeming with life; without her, it is only a desert of sand.

CHAPTER V

The Man As Father

In silent moments of reflection man may catch a brief glimpse of the deep truth that the immense universe is one gigantic enterprise of paternity. A passion to serve awakens within him. One day, in a fleeting instance of vision, his vocation appears clear to him. His whole life is suddenly orientated: he will be a father. He sets forth, heavy with his secret, strong and confident in his Lord. A woman's heart understands. She joins her gift to his. In a sacrament they consecrate their lives which henceforward are but one life in one love. They are equal; they are equally loved by God. But man is the "head": to him this great project has been confided. The child that will be born will be the fruit of their love, but it will bear the name of this man; it will be of his race. For this man is *the father*.

To give life, to reflect God's fatherhood before his children, and to lead these to heaven—such is the *vocation of a father*.

The Gift of Life

It is a solemn moment when man discovers within himself that creative instinct which, at times, makes him dream of adventuring along life's highways in search of a new world and inspires him with an overwhelming desire to dedicate his life to some immense labor. In the sacred aura of love he understands that this creative impatience is a preparation for fatherhood. In marriage he finds the great work of his life: the empire he must found is his home; the new world he must create and explore is his child.

Nor is he a father only in that moment in which he calls forth a new life. Day after day he must continue to give life to his child. Education is a prolonged creation. After having engendered a body, the father must awaken and guide to maturity an intelligence, a heart and a conscience. It is a long and exacting labor. Daily he must ask himself: are my example, my speech, my warnings, my patience, my demands and my advice really *creative*? This amounts to asking himself if he is really alive, for only life is creative of life. One can give life only by giving his own life. Too many fathers seem to ignore this. They are content, in the manner of a sculptor with his chisel in hand, to fashion from the outside another being which they call their child. This is not education. It is not thus that life is given.

The father is not alone in undertaking and guiding to completion this work of education. A mother stands at his side. To assure growth, to give life, it takes two people united in one love. This is the great secret of education. The intimate collaboration of mother and father is the key to success in education. Their mutual love is the

daily bread of the child; if he is deprived of it, a cry of pain arises within him—the complaint of a heart that is dying of hunger.

The father is also creative in conducting the affairs of his household. The framework within which the children live, the material order and still more the moral order that reigns in the home is of inestimable importance in the child's development and fulfillment. The role of the father in this matter is primordial. He can never forget that he is the head. Yet he must not abuse his authority. This, too, must be creative, a gift of life. Authority and love are one and the same thing. The father is *author* because he loves; *authority* is love in action. This may not always be visible elsewhere, but it is evident in the family. It is important to recall at this point, that, cut off from God, the father is cut off from the source of love; his authority, then no longer the sacrament of divine authority, degenerates into the mortal travesty of authoritarianism.

It is not enough that a father exercise authority. It is equally important that the child be receptive to it. A child cannot refuse the call to life, which is the first gift of his father, but he can close himself to other manifestations of paternal love. A father must then impart to his child a sense of true submission. This is in nowise the resignation of a slave, but an attitude of love, an opening of the heart. *Submission* is a part of filial love, just as *authority* is a part of paternal love. This submission is indispensable if the creative impulse of God is to work through the father and influence the child in whom the adult is little by little emerging.

Indeed, much more than a future adult, there is in the child a potential people. Consider this little calculation:

a man who has five children, each of whom in turn has five children, how many descendants will he have in ten generations?

A man is not fully a father unless he wishes to be the head of a race, unless he consents to be the king of a people and refuses all respite, on earth where his mission begins, and in heaven where his mission shall continue, as long as he has not led each of his progeny to the Father, whose humble servant he is. His responsibility is great: he risks bequeathing the stain of original sin. But he can also transmit a blessing which, in his children, will be a title to divine graces.

The Father As the Image of God

To those who know how to listen all of creation speaks of the Lord. The storm thundering over Sinai taught the Hebrews something of the power of God; the nights filled with sparkling stars have spoken to the shepherds of every century of the wisdom of the Creator. Like creation itself, the father is charged with a divine message. But his is much more essential, much more intimate and far richer. For the fatherhood of man is the revelation of God's paternity. The father is the image of the Father. To no other creature has God given so generously of His trust, His power and His likeness. That is why we use the same word *father* both to address him from whom we have received human life and to invoke God.

Christ always spoke of fathers with great reverence and love. "If you, wicked servants that you are, know how to give good things to your children. . . ." And again: "A father had two sons. . . ." This love is the echo

of Christ's love for His Father. In the men of Palestine he found a diminished but very real reflection of that same love. In spite of their human frailties, they remained fathers; and Christ could point to them to reveal something of the nature of his own Father without any fear of leading us into error. What Christ demanded of fathers then, he demands of them now and will always demand: that the image of God in them never be obliterated. To fathers, primarily, he addresses these words: "Be ye perfect as your heavenly father is perfect." It is not only in the interests of his children that a father endeavors each day to be a better father; it is also to become a more direct revelation of God and therefore manifest Him the more to those about him. Happy indeed is the father who has initiated his children into the divine mysteries!

It is by thus exercising his paternity that a father disposes his children little by little to an attitude of soul that is truly filial towards God, and prepares in them "a climate that is favorable to the development of the three theological virtues of faith, hope and charity. If a father can banish from his words all trace of deception and from his actions all trace of pretension and artificiality, the limitless faith his children will place in him will become the image and the basis of the theological virtue of Faith. If he always responds generously and with all the effectiveness he can command whenever he is asked for help or advice on a difficult and confusing problem, the supreme confidence his children will have in him will become the image and basis of Hope; and if he loves his children with the very heart of God, there will be in his love something indeed far greater than an image and basis for the theological virtue of Charity."

Noblesse oblige! Can there be any stronger stimulus for a father than to know that he is invested with such a mission?

When a father fails in this responsibility he is guilty of a grievous crime. His indifference, his severity or his lack of consideration can have profoundly disturbing effects upon the child. A boy or a girl will know many bitter deceptions in life but, if we except that of a mother, none wounds more deeply than a father's failure. None runs a greater risk of destroying in them the very foundations of faith and of preparing in them an open revolt against God. By his desertion, a father not only betrays himself; he betrays God in the souls of his children.

The seriousness of a father's failure only serves to evoke the grandeur of his vocation. More than any other creature, indeed far more than the flower in which Rabindranath Tagore invites us to see a "letter from the beloved," the father is a living Gospel, bearing to his children the good news that *God is a Father*.

Children of God

The father transmits human life to his children. It also falls within his vocation to communicate supernatural life. I know fathers who experience a sentiment of sadness at this thought, when they hold a newborn child in their arms. Could this nostalgia be a confused memory of nobility that has been lost? As a matter of fact theologians tell us that before original sin men would have had the privilege of transmitting grace with natural life. However the case may have been then, fathers must now accept their limits and lead their children to Christ

through the person of the priest, to obtain the gift of grace that will make them, in all truth, sons of God. I spoke of sadness; but all sadness becomes joy when a father realizes that a new tie binds him to God: the baptized child is henceforward proof of the love of a father for God and the love of God for a father. A living gift of the father to God, a living gift of God to the father.

As on the day of his birth, a father assumes a responsibility on the day of his child's baptism. He undertakes to cultivate this supernatural life which he has taken the initiative to ask of God for his child. Because the principle of this life is not in him, he must not for that reason neglect his active role in the spiritual growth of this young Christian. The sacrament of marriage, which gives him the graces necessary to live his love in a splendid manner, also confers upon him the help he needs to maintain, develop, and increase the life of God that has become rooted in the heart of the infant. And here, much more than in his other activities of an educator, he must be closely united to God the Father. He must be a supple instrument in His hands. He must practice "the virtue of transparency."

Christ, as the first educator of the children of God, will be his teacher. Let the father meditate on these words: "I have come not to be served but to serve." Let him follow Christ's example, in the service of divine paternity in the souls of his children. Let him imitate Christ, leaving his apostles before any great decision and retiring into the solitude of the mountains to pray. Let him remember that there are graces which only prayer can obtain; that there are demons which can be cast out only by fasting.

In this way a profound union will gradually be estab-

lished between the father and his Redeemer. Like Christ and with Him he can say to the Father: "I have manifested thy name to the men whom thou hast given me out of the world. . . . Father, keep them in thy name. . . . I have prayed for them. . . . And all my things are thine, and thine are mine. . . . For them do I sanctify myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth."

The father will discover another mystery in his dialogue with Christ: "If the seed does not fall into the ground and die, it will not bear fruit; but if it dies, it will bear much fruit." He will learn that there is something greater than giving life and that is to give himself for those he loves. He will consent generously to the numerous sacrifices that are demanded of him. . . . With St. Paul he can then say: "I complete in my flesh what is wanting to the passion of Christ," for my children. And when the hour of death falls, the prayer of a father will again be the prayer of Christ: "I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. . . . I pray not that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep them from evil. . . . That they may be one. . . . And I have made known thy name to them and will make it known: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them. . . ."

The Father in Perspective

Let us conclude these remarks by contemplating the figure of the father in its full perspective. This man who, at the invitation of God, decides to give life and conceives first of all in his soul the child who will issue from his flesh, who realizes clearly the splendor of the mission he is undertaking and promises to follow it faith-

fully to the end, who consents to all the gifts of love and all the renouncements that this vocation will demand of him—such a man truly merits the name of father. Those who give life without reflection are not worthy of fatherhood, any more than are those who reluctantly accept an unwanted child, the involuntary consequence of the act of love.

There is in every decent man a desire for responsibility. It can be detected in the most unassuming of men. But what responsibilities are comparable to those of paternity? Most others are small in comparison: they do not demand an unreserved gift of self. Paternity, on the other hand, involves the whole man and for always: it is not a burden that can be shrugged off along the wayside. The abdication of a father is no mere setting aside of a partial responsibility. It is a desertion. A father can never cease giving life to his child. He who does not accept these responsibilities is not a man. He who accepts them begrudgingly is little better than a mercenary. But he who accepts them and carries them with a full awareness of their import and with love is a veritable lord. There can be no greater nobility than fatherhood, because no love is more gratuitous; no gift is more definitive.

Only he is fully a man who has received investiture of paternity. Who is not a father is frequently only an eternal adolescent, at the mercy of every tempting adventure. Only in paternity does the potential of every human faculty come into play and attain fulfillment.

To be a father is to be an adult in the fullest sense of the word; it is to accede to the highest plane of activity which every man desires instinctively. In this capacity he is legislator, judge, master, defender, priest and king. Man is made for all of that. His family is the arena of

his integrity and his competence. At the social level he can attain only partial fulfillment; on the other hand, his social action will be effective to the degree that he has exercised his manhood in the home.

Again, we must not forget that the father does not work alone. At his side is a helpmate whose mission it is to share his life; whose highest duty and purest love help him resist the temptations that ever threaten to make him forget his duties as a father. A woman's masterpiece is a father. How can a man become a sovereign if her intelligence and patient love do not encourage him each day? How can he understand his children if she does not explain them to him? And how can children honor and love their father if she does not orientate their hearts towards him?

But a father needs much more than human support to remain faithful to his vocation and to acquire that paternal perfection which his children are entitled to expect from him. He must be a man of prayer. His prayer must be that quiet in which a father communes with the Father, that heart-to-heart conversation where he meets his God in open trust, knowing by experience what a paternal heart is. In this kind of prayer, the father will draw down those graces which he needs so much to understand in an ever greater way—through contemplating the love of God for His Son—what a father on earth must be for his children.

CHAPTER VI

Life Through Love

The greatest joy a man and woman can know is, surely, to give life.

God has shared with them the power of collaborating in the work of creation, of peopling heaven and earth. Few people ever deny the fact of this redoubtable and grandiose power; many, however, ask themselves questions like these: Should we use it with prodigality? Should it be exercised as often as possible under pain of shirking duty and not corresponding to divine generosity?

Much could be said on this theme. We could, for example, construct a well balanced theoretical debate. But souls are not hungry for theory.

We are writing for Christians and I think it can be taken for granted that none among us would like to be accused of cheating God.

But there are practical problems to be considered here. To give life to children, to elevate them worthily is always a heavy responsibility. It is to take on one's shoul-

ders a grave burden that can never be laid down in this life. Can we commit ourselves indefinitely in this matter? What if our strength threatens to give out? Must we pay no attention to fatigue or to prudence—which would always be cowardly, or to reason—which would always be narrowly calculating? Or must exhaustion and sacrifice be accepted as an unbending law? Or would it not be wise on the other hand to strike a middle course and balance our responsibilities with our means, to neither presume on ourselves or on Providence?

Most Christian couples are asking themselves, explicitly or not, these questions. Certainly fruitfulness is their honor and their nobility. But it cannot be denied that they suffer secret doubts and interior torments. There is no possibility of eluding the difficulty, of throwing off their obligations or even of procrastinating. One can live in peace only by taking sides. What man, however courageous and confident, has not had his hour of fear, or at least of apprehension, in seeing the cradles rapidly filling the nursery? What woman, a mother already overworked, has not trembled at the first sign of a new pregnancy?

When these doubts and fears assail us we can always ask advice. We need the counsel and enlightenment of others. But in such matters as these no one can make our decisions for us. Basically, each home is an island that must answer for itself. I am, of course, not forgetting God, prayer and grace. But God leaves us free and we must use that liberty correctly. Can we ever be sure, even with the best of good will, of having chosen the right vocation? A certain doubt always lies buried in our conscience. We carry within us a disagreeable zone of discomfort and anxiety whence arises the sensitiveness

each of us experiences as soon as this subject is touched upon.

It is therefore with extreme charity that we must approach these inner struggles and painful dramas. And in this case the most efficacious form of charity is not to parade principles, since principles must always be in accord with the variety of circumstances. We must try to understand the value of different attitudes, banish all traces of intransigence, crushing severity and lack of respect. Above all, we must invite souls to a clear understanding of the problem and to interior loyalty; we must help them to see clearly within themselves and to understand the apparently contradictory exigencies of Christian virtues; and finally, we must assure them that they are not deceived by mirages or fraudulent imitation. Inner peace is the reward of sincerity.

Mystery of Fruitfulness

A Christian who marries has made a choice among the different forms of perfect life. He has renounced the joys and responsibilities of celibacy and virginity to know other joys and responsibilities and principally the intoxicating joy of calling forth new life. Human love finds its fulfillment in fruitfulness. No Christian man worthy of the name would dare deny it.

The State performs its duty when it draws up statistics, when it becomes concerned over the low birth rate or care of the aged or when it creates a social framework favorable to family life. All of this is certainly praiseworthy in its own right. But a Christian who transmits life, and transmits it generously, does not act after the manner of the State. He goes beyond this and looks

higher. He follows a vocation. He participates joyfully and humbly in the mystery of Being. To give life is to justify love; it is to safeguard love by multiplying it. It is still more: it is to accomplish a great act of religion.

For a father and a mother the most excellent thing in the world is this life they have chosen to perpetuate. In the presence of their newborn child they dream of the grown man he will one day be. They see a soul called to be a saint. And since in them a tradition is continued and a line of descendants prolonged, they experience their solidarity with a rich past and a mysterious future. Only a mother and a father are really bound to other men, to the dead and the living, to generations past and future; they are joined to these by their children.

They are closer to God, too, for from Him they have received a small parcel of creative power and for Him they are preparing saints. We cannot even imagine the power and immense privilege of giving brothers to Christ! Parents are finally brought closer to one another, since the child is the measure and the bond of their love and prevents them from falling into the suffocating tendrils of egoism and pride. Fruitfulness crowns the mystery of love. It alone gives to marriage all of its moral, human and religious significance. It deepens their personalities. In certain cases it illuminates; for mystery only blinds those who turn away from it. "But he that doth truth cometh to the light" (John 3:21). Those who enter upon the path of submission to God's will are more easily capable of orientating themselves and of prefiguring the harmony of the universe.

The only proof I offer of these reflections here is the great cry of deliverance and blessing that echoes in the

brilliant lines of Claudel's "Magnificat"—probably the most beautiful hymn to paternity ever written!

"Now between me and other men there is this difference: I am a father of one of them. . . ."

But there is no necessity to exalt the nobility and the value of fruitfulness for Christians. Neither sarcasms nor the superior smiles of the sceptical can shake their conviction. They have measured the gift of God and wish only to return that gift. We can take it for granted that every Christian home is ready to welcome children. But how many? On this point all the difficulties begin.

The Virtue of Abandon

"As many as you can," say the intrepid. "Not to have the greatest number of children destined to eternal happiness is to limit God's glory."

Such is at least the simplest theoretical justification of the partisans of fruitfulness without limit. But it is a fragile argument. In spite of its mystical character, it is puerile because it brings the rules of geometry and arithmetic into a domain where all human calculations are mysteriously transcended. Indeed it would soon become inhuman if one were to draw the conclusion that the survival of a child mattered little so long as it received Baptism. It is difficult enough to maintain levelheadedness in discussion without taking pleasure in embarrassing our partner or driving him to the wall of contradiction or fanaticism. Large families are not based upon so poor a mixture of mathematics and mysticism. In fact they are usually found among those who are least calculating. In the final analysis, they are based on one of the most beautiful of all Christian virtues: abandon, hope.

Those who have seen such families need no convincing—and others will have no trouble imagining—that abandon to Providence is necessary. And by that we do mean something other than lifeless fatalism or foolish presumption. We are speaking of clear-headed heroism that takes the promises of our Lord literally: “Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof . . . behold the lilies of the field. . . .” Henceforward we can bid adieu to long, drawn-out plans, complacent comfort and smug satisfaction with ourselves. We are pledged to a life of sacrifice and denudation—at least of spiritual denudation. We must simplify everything, even our souls; but this poverty, from other points of view, enriches. We gain, for example, energy and ingenuity. We become like smiling warriors, ever ready to do battle with the enemy. And in our warfare we begin to experience tangible aid from above. Divine prodigality follows upon human generosity. If such families fulfill a certain Christian ideal, there remain nevertheless several ways of understanding and of carrying out the responsibilities of marriage, within the same vocation. Numerous options are still possible.

Ambiguity of a Large Family

Before being a hero, many esteem a father of twelve children (a symbolical number) to be a privileged character. He must command, if not a large income, at least considerable resources. He must have a place to house all of his children. He must be free from material restraint. “God never abandons His children,” some say. “The father of twelve children is above all a man of faith,” say others. We can agree with this although it is always dangerous to speculate on Divine Providence.

God is not a kind of ingenious Captain who automatically stops up all leakages in our ship. Providence lets the victims of a shipwreck save themselves. We must distinguish here between lack of foresight and the sin of imprudence and frivolity.

If a father of twelve is privileged it is above all because he has met a valiant woman. In this matter, we have every right to center consideration upon mothers.

The physical and moral strength, the resources of spirit and heart, the virtues of abnegation and adaptability necessary to a mother of twelve are beyond calculation. It is impossible to measure the number of sacrifices she consents to make. We can leave aside for the moment the heroic patience demanded by so many months—even years—of pregnancy and think of the accumulation of responsibilities, the affectionate and inexorable tyranny imposed by so many children. Give this mother all the domestic aid you please, still she will have very little time to think of herself, of her mind, her culture or her personal development. Many will retort that culture has no place in a mother's life. "The constant exercise," they say, "of her maternal obligations is the real mission and consequently the only happiness for woman."

Thus we see her consecrated to the heartless wear and tear of a difficult vocation and premature exhaustion. But let us not be deceived by fine phrases. Few women are disposed to accept with gaiety of heart, with all the serenity of a reasoned and free commitment, such a program of life. Many of them do not have the necessary health. Still others are not prepared by their education, or by the environment in which they grew up, to understand the natural and supernatural beauty of this kind of heroism. There are any number of other conditions of

mind and heart that a mother must also fulfill. We may well ask whether they are fulfilled, even by those who, in point of fact, have fewer children.

This opens up a new problem. It is one thing to want many children; quite another to submit to having them. This sort of fruitfulness is at best second best. Many women make this submission either because they do not wish to violate the commandment of God or perhaps because they do not wish to refuse their husband. Their dedication conserves something of its grandeur. Nevertheless, it is difficult to esteem a hero, a man who does not know how or does not wish to practice restraint; difficult to consider the home a model in which the joy of one partner is the terror of the other. Of course no one has the power of judging from the outside the secrets of hearts or the motives behind actions. Yet in many cases the beauty of a large family appears a little disconcerting to outsiders. The very real danger exists, for the man at least, that a way of itself onerous may become an easy way. And here we must declare that something is to be said for conjugal chastity. It, too, is legitimate and heroic in its own right.

Supernatural Prudence

We do not have to consider the inhumanity of the world in which we live very long to perceive the savagery with which it conspires against the family. Many young couples living in apartments simply do not have room for children. Or if they have the good fortune of a large home, the high cost of living and constant threat of inflation militates against their good intentions. It is a fact that today a large number of homes, especially urban

homes, cannot possibly welcome too many children. Then there is the perennial question of health. Many women worn out by frequent pregnancies aspire in vain to regain their strength. It is therefore evident that there are cases, today more numerous than ever, where, in the name of human prudence, couples must space their children, and in some cases, cease having them altogether. And supernatural prudence will ratify these decisions, provided the parents are perfectly loyal to their conscience.

If we sincerely believe, after reasoned examination and thought, that a new child will endanger the equilibrium of a home (I am using the word in its most human and profound sense, and not in a contemptible financial sense), then it is the role of Christian virtue to safeguard that equilibrium. Would this be to open the doors to a masked egoism, to the desire for spiritual comfort or to God only knows what self-indulging pretension for human respect? Undoubtedly that danger exists; it is always easy to shuffle off our responsibilities under the pretense of impossibility. Egoism uses subtle camouflages. But this illusion is only a danger and not a rule. And it can be avoided once the home has reached a certain maturity of spirituality. Everything depends upon the human and spiritual efforts that have already been made, upon how genuine the proofs of our generosity have been in the past. Prudence as a supernatural virtue can be exercised only if it is enlightened and sustained by all the other virtues.

I believe that once a certain degree of spirituality has been attained in a life penetrated by prayer and illumined by faith, when we know how to ask for grace with humility, then we can hope to avoid crass errors of judg-

ment and the craftily laid traps of laziness and pharisaism. Then there is place for continence. The golden rule is to be sincere with oneself, with our partner, and to make all decisions together.

There is great beauty in the efforts of two people not to be dominated by animal instinct; not to consent to an act whose consequences they no longer desire; to keep well under control the course of their lives. They cannot be charged with egoistic calculation. On the contrary this conjugal chastity is so difficult that it requires ceaseless struggling, suffering and, indeed, heroism. The limits of this article do not permit me to go into this problem that is so crucial in many homes. I merely wish to point out that conjugal chastity comports two degrees: absolute continence or that of long duration and, second, periodic continence based on the Ogino method. All calculations here remain hazardous since the physiological laws in this domain are capricious. Those who attempt it with sufficiently justified motives can be given credit for their good will and at least elementary prudence. But in a Christian heart one virtue does not exclude another.

If, in spite of these efforts, a child is conceived, the problem changes. Better still, the problem disappears altogether. The prudence exercised by the parents could easily take on the gloomy and petty countenance of regret if they did not welcome the unexpected child without hesitation or reserve, with the same fervor and the same manifestation of joy as they welcomed the others. They must ask God, with hope and filial fear, for the strength and grace they need to bear this additional burden. Thus it is a choice between two heroisms: the heroism of continence or the heroism of grateful acceptance.

This is not merely a theoretical juggling of words, or an attempt to find a loophole in the law of God. Rather it is a hard reality dictated by the circumstances of the modern family. Perhaps we can affirm without paradox that prudence calls forth generosity and, far from setting itself up against other virtues, is maintained and supported by them.

In any case, conjugal chastity must serve to promote love. It can succeed only if it dilates the personality instead of imposing restrictions upon it. There is a danger that must constantly be resisted of becoming obsessed with the privations we suffer and thence of falling into a kind of cantankerous stoicism. We must recall that love is not restricted to a physical gift. Nor is fruitfulness only of the body. A father and mother are never through giving life to their children. If they must renounce calling new children into existence, they are then freer to give more attention to those they already have. They must try to understand better their ideals and satisfy better the needs of their minds and souls. This task of the education of their children is one that is noble enough and complex enough to occupy them totally. It assumes a union between them just as precious as physical union, of which it is after all the consequence. It is the work of a lifetime that elevates their ideals, broadens their horizons and safeguards them from unhappiness. Indeed there are no limits to this deepening of love, of which the education of children is at once the means and the symbol.

Thus conjugal chastity, provided it brings the parents to a better understanding of the hierarchy of values and enables them to see their lives in a broader perspective, is a source of human progress. But it does not take on its

fullest meaning until it is put at the service of a greater love.

Necessity of Heroism

There are no easy answers to this problem of fruitfulness. There are no pat solutions. Each home must find its own way, often in suffering, and seek out its own manner of joining the necessary generosity with the indispensable prudence.

The greatest danger is falsehood, especially that type of self-deception that warps our whole interior life. It gives rise to a certain fatalism or a lack of self-control that can easily be taken for abnegation and faith. In all such falsehood there is a certain faint-hearted egoism that reveals a selfish desire for spiritual consolation.

Beneath all of the prevarications there is an element of truth. It can differ in aspect as the multifarious circumstances differ that command individual destinies. But they find a common denominator in this, that they postulate heroism. There is heroism in accepting a large family. There is also heroism in a justified refusal to go beyond an average family. And this heroism is possible only if it is founded on human love and nourished by love of God. It is a heroism that really enlarges the scope of love.

In writing these reflections I have not thought of those who reject Christian morality. I can imagine their astonishment if they should happen to fall by this article. "Such an effort to solve a problem that really doesn't exist at all!" they will say. It is useless to argue with them. They live in another world. They do not attach the same value to words or sentiments as we do. In the moral universe they inhabit, the laws of gravity operate

differently. They seem more elastic. But they are also of less value. The bitter fruits that are sometimes the result of their dexterity and easy manipulation of the moral law are not worth our consideration: so much perversion, unhappiness and vacuity of soul! Indeed their heroism is a heroism stripped of its supernatural character.

In compensation I have often thought of our many young homes. Marriages are earlier today, and that is evidence of health. But it would not be good if these marriages were too little prepared. Young people, in contracting premature unions, simplify their moral life by finding an easy means of evading the struggle for purity. But if the number of children increases regularly, they run the risk of a frustrated middle age. It is not sufficient that they elaborate a program of life at the time of their marriage that is usually blatantly unreal; for the sake of the dignity of the vocation they have chosen, they should be counseled that Christian marriage is an uphill road, and that the incline is arduous.

I have thought, too, of the many unhappy homes in our slums for whom the practice of virtue is only too evidently impossible (considering the frightful conditions of their life). There is here a very real conflict between generosity and prudence. Charity binds us to understand the difficulties of Christian life in such circumstances.

We would be dishonest if we let our personal problems cloud over for even a minute the injustice of so much unhappiness. We are all jointly responsible. We should feel to the marrow of our bones the misery of a world that condemns men to moral disorder. The best way to solve—or at least to diminish—our problems, and to see them as they really are, is to compare them with those of others and to wage war upon all forms of misery.

CHAPTER VII

The Flesh and the Spirit

It cannot be denied that the flesh holds an important place in conjugal love.

We must not exaggerate it, although many married couples, especially in the beginning of their married life, experience the fire of physical union to such an extent that they can master only with difficulty its all-pervading reality. Priests and educators are frequently asked, and sometimes asked with anxiety: "What place must we give to the flesh? What attitude does Christianity indicate?"

The answers are not always in agreement, and the different currents of thought that Christian tradition presents on this point do not simplify a problem that is already difficult. The celebrated sentence of Francois Mauriac: "Christianity does not give the flesh its rightful place, but suppresses it," translates an attitude that is fairly widespread in certain Christian milieux as a consequence of Jansenism and also of certain pessimistic thoughts in St.

Augustine. From there, it is only a step to saying that the flesh corrupts the spirit, that it is always a danger, a threat and a principle of corruption.

Is the flesh then an enemy that must be strangled? Christian doctrine, in its totality, does not think so; rather, it affirms that the flesh, far from being suppressed, must be evangelized and redeemed just as the soul.

A sane philosophy is here indispensable. Let us recall that man is not made of two contradictory and divergent elements: the body and the soul. He is a body animated by a soul, this soul being *incarnate*. Man is a whole, a unity. Any dualistic formula pretending that the creature God made in His image is composed of two juxtaposed (or even opposed) realities is to be rejected. What is true—that the hierarchy that should normally exist for human equilibrium and the advantage of the soul—is contradicted by the fact of sin. Here the words of St. Paul take on all of their meaning: “The flesh, instead of being subordinated to the spirit, militates against it and constantly endangers the harmony of the splendid image of God.”

The rebellions of the flesh, its demands which at certain moments can appear tyrannic, the difficulties it sets in the way of spiritualizing effects of grace, must not be judged therefore on a purely philosophical basis. The human condition is determined by two historical events: sin and redemption. If accord between the flesh and the spirit is a laborious conquest, it is because the human condition (which is that of a redeemed sinner) is itself the work of long and exacting preparation in which the treasures of grace and the generous response of created nature must cooperate.

St. Paul's condemnation of the flesh was never uni-

lateral. What he calls flesh is sinful man—it is humanity hypnotized by evil; while “spirit” symbolizes in his eyes the new creature, body and soul, regenerated in the redemptive blood of Christ. The body itself, which because of certain idolatrous cults of antiquity could become the object of legitimate suspicion on the part of Christians, is magnificently rehabilitated since the order of Redemption not only renders it worthy of association with the soul, but considers it together with the soul the temple of the Holy Spirit. The apostrophe of the epistle to the Corinthians is just as astonishing today as it was to the readers of the first century: “Do you not know that the body is for the Lord and the Lord for the body?”

Christianity does not thus divide human nature. One of its most formal principles is respect for the nature and the laws of creation. It does not mutilate man; it restores him. It renders the whole man capable of living his life as an image of God. If it cautions us against the deviations of the flesh and its disordinate impulses as well as against pride of spirit and “angelism” it is through fidelity to the creative will of God. To put asunder what God has joined together is to sin both against creation and against the work of Christ who redeemed us—body and soul—at a great price.

Thus, everything ultimately depends on the *sense* that man consents to give to the flesh. If he judges it from the point of view of an egoist, completely independent of the laws of the universe to which he must submit, he turns it away from its end. The flesh is not sinful; rather man made of it an instrument of sin. If, on the contrary, he freely yields to the order of the world willed by God, if he accepts the facts of existence (creation, sin, redemption) and seeks, with the aid of divine grace, the restora-

tion of fallen humanity, he gives to the flesh its true vocation. He liberates it from the evil with which it is burdened and makes it serve the supreme ideal of love.

*The Conjugal Act:
Its Intentions and Its Qualities*

The conjugal act is often a sin; still more often a doubtful and mediocre act, because man deprives it of its meaning. Envisaged as it should be, following the design of God, it can become highly meritorious. It is then more than an act; it is a work.

The conjugal act is justified by the ends of marriage, namely, the propagation of the species, the total fulfillment of the partners, and peace of soul and body. It is not then a reprehensible act in itself to which the sacrament of marriage brings, as though from the outside, a kind of legitimation to permit married people to choose the lesser of two evils.

Christian theology, represented here by explicit texts of St. Thomas Aquinas, affirms that the act of marriage is honorable, that it is moral, and that it is in itself, in its intrinsic finality, that it finds this honor and this morality. St. Augustine taught the same thing. If concupiscence is evil, says the Bishop of Hippo, since it is the "penalty and sting of sin," the conjugal act puts concupiscence itself in the service of good. Pope Innocent XI ratified these doctrinal affirmations.

Let us specify that if procreation is impossible, because of involuntary sterility, the two other ends of marriage suffice to justify physical relations in marriage. Finally, let us not forget that the matrimonial consent exchanged on the wedding day which gives to each partner a right

to the body of the other, is a *real* right. The expression "conjugal debt" often used is exact. Love is not the only consideration here; there is also the question of justice. However, we must recall that if the right exists, its usage is not indispensable to the essence of marriage. If, through mutual agreement, a husband and wife decide to practice perpetual continence, their union is perfectly valid. Therefore we cannot pretend that conjugal relations are absolutely necessary. Here again it is the spirit that dominates the flesh and determines the part to be played by sex.

With these few principles in mind, let us insist further on the *quality* of the conjugal act. If it is not sinful in itself, it does not follow that it is always good. It cannot, furthermore, be neither good nor bad. An important principle of Thomistic moral theology is that there is no such thing as an indifferent act. Married couples must therefore know that the spiritual state of their soul confers to their physical relations a certain quality which will serve or destroy their love. As Christians they can find here an occasion for an increase of grace; or, on the other hand, they can weaken their supernatural vitality.

Since all acts of conjugal life, if they are carried out in fidelity to the general intentions of the sacrament, are good and consequently meritorious, the husband and wife must see to it, not only that they are united in the state of grace, but also that the conjugal act never be an animal act, but always a human act. This means:

1. *A spiritual act* and therefore *a free act*. Sex is not merely an outlet for the caprices of instinct. The soul must also express itself through the body. In this case a human person speaks to another human person in the

language of total adhesion and seeks (in the words of Scripture) to know the other through the intermediary of the senses. If there be no spiritual communication of persons, if sensual tyranny is given full reign and satisfaction, if only a delectation, even though legitimate, is sought in reciprocal egoism, what should be a human act becomes frighteningly mutilated.

Such an exercise of liberty calls, moreover, for education. The conjugal act can be a free act from the outset; or it can at any time cease to be free. Instinct sometimes obscures the spirit which may believe itself master over the flesh. Even if there be no danger of becoming unduly concerned by disordinate temptations of the sexual instinct, constant vigilance must be maintained. This educative work must be pursued without respite and the grace of God sought, in humble and constant prayer, to assure a virtuous domination of the soul over the senses.

We cannot forget that the realities here involved are extremely complex. The flesh remains a mystery. Even when the conjugal act is accomplished in full liberty, it may not be completely subjugated to the veritable development of husband and wife until after long months, or even years, of life together. One of the merits of Doctor Houvenroux's book *Témoignage sur l'Amour Humain* is to have insisted on the patience required by love. Attentive respect, a certain forgetting of self and a great concern for the good of the other are indispensable to both partners. Nature demands this patience of them. Because of egoism or of precipitation, many homes never know this desired accord in the domain of the carnal.

2. *An act of love*: The harmony we have been speaking of supposes more than freedom and patience, for it is a work of love. The conjugal act is sometimes the

crowning of the union of hearts, and sometimes the means of attaining and deepening this union. Nature has designed it as an exceptional meeting ground of the three ends of marriage, but, without love, it cannot be the magnificent gesture of intimacy and fruitfulness willed by the Creator. As an expression of love and a servant of love, such a union truly becomes a hymn of praise to God. Intimacy is good, fruitfulness is good, since God has made them part of marriage and He has willed that these two aspects be inseparable. But without love, they are a horrible caricature of love!

Mutual respect and attention, for which we pleaded earlier in this chapter, has no better guarantee than a delicate love that is in perpetual reference to Love itself. The redemptive graces of Christ are here indispensable. We can understand the intransigence of a Church that wishes to take the responsibilities only of those marriages she has blessed. The grace of marriage, the grace of a "permanent" sacrament heals a wounded nature by helping it against its anarchic impulses; it also saves love by carrying half of its burden and by deepening its quality with all of the resources of divine charity.

3. *A meritorious act*: This is implied in what we have already said. Certainly, all acts of conjugal life are bearers of divine life, if they are accomplished according to the order of grace, and it would be wrong to see in physical union a kind of privileged instance of married life. Acts of the soul, even if they be limited to the soul, can have still greater value and those who practice periodic continence imposed upon them by circumstances of life, know that their love deepens through the Christian virtue of *sacrifice* freely consented to. But it remains true that all the spiritual horizons are opened on the con-

jugal act which is thus subordinated to the total Christian life. There is no such thing as an indifferent act, let us repeat. Where many married couples find an occasion to wallow in the sensual, others, penetrated by charity and desirous of living in fidelity to their consecrated love, find a new motive as well as a possible occasion of spiritual progress and love of God.

Such a purified outlook, a will stripped of all egoism, and such a sense of the high vocation of love is not obtained immediately. The ambient of the world is so opposed to such a state of soul and the poor human body is prey to such sollicitations and excitations in the pagan surroundings of our society, that here too a slow education and progressive conquest of the human by grace is called for. It is a great comfort to know that the soul and the will do not depend upon their own efforts for success; more important than their efforts is the total confidence they place in the work of divine life. Insensibly, under the effect of the sacraments and the general merits of Christian life, the evangelization of the flesh will take place; the discouragements and deceptions will give way to the joy of those who know that God is with them. For it is God who heals and saves.

Continence

Side by side with physical union there is a place in married life for continence, either because of the human rhythm of love or because exterior circumstances impose it. In the past few years the gravity of these circumstances has grown frighteningly: It may be a question of impaired health or difficulties of the material and economic order that oblige many homes to face seriously the prob-

lem of "birth limitation." In the interest of home life, the equilibrium of the wife and mother, the education of the children, a certain family policy is most desirable. But it supposes, if it is not to lead many parents directly into sin and, finally, a state of habitual sin, a good deal of generosity and a Christian sense of values constantly nourished at the well-springs of grace.

There are three possible attitudes in this matter: either the laws of conjugal chastity are ignored, and our present-day society, profoundly corrupt, usually chooses this way out; or continence is observed in a slavish manner, temporarily, because one of the partners senses the opposition of the other to conjugal deception—in this case, the sacrifice does not bear all of its fruit or, third, a more or less prolonged sacrifice takes on a positive character and finds its justification and its end in the broad spiritual perspective offered by the Christian doctrine of marriage. For continence makes a cross, and when we speak of the cross we speak in the same breath of progress and life.

Let us see, in effect, how continence, freely accepted and not grudgingly borne, can, far from opposing or smothering it, serve love.

Those who profit by it are first of all—let us not hesitate to say—the children. Participating in the work of creation when physical union is possible and desirable, Christian husbands and wives must also participate in the work of redemption. The periods of sacrifice borne and offered for the salvation of these little ones with which God has blessed their union, will permit the parents to give birth as it were to the souls that have been confided to them. Why not think of the words of St. Paul: "I fill up in my flesh what is lacking to the passion of Christ, for His body which is the Church"? Our children are

our own, but they are also the Church's. We have the power of taking part in their redemption by virtue of the discipline which we impose on our bodies. A child must not be the fruit of a fulfilled love only, for, body and soul, he solicits the paternity and maternity of a love freely sacrificed.

The parents themselves will also profit by continence. There is nothing more harmful than habit, if we give this word the sense of routine. Continence is the savor of love which frequent and instinctive use of marital rights tends to deaden, even though we may not be aware of it. There is about love a certain quality of wholeness which physical union tends to obliterate. If experience proves that married people have too little in common, it is because the union of spirit and soul—which is the supreme mode of union—is too seldom attained by them. It is good that, by nature, by circumstances of life or by the exigencies of grace, this sacrifice be made in the name of love as a means of seeking in the soul new kinds of expression and new depths.

Many couples have thus experienced that this separation will not isolate them but on the contrary unite them the more intimately. But to be positive, continence must be *accepted*; we have already said this and we insist upon it. That is why the forces of love in this matter—as everywhere else—call forth the mysterious and inexhaustible resources of grace. What may appear humanly insurmountable becomes, if not easy, at least possible to those who recall our Savior's words: "*Without Me you can do nothing.*" The evidence of experience is conclusive: deprived of the assistance of the sacraments, of prayer, of an apostolic life, of the gift of self in all of its forms, the efforts of husband and wife will remain

for the most part ineffective. If the *whole* Christian life is not based on the human foundation of good will it must necessarily wane under the pressure of instinct and the influence of a corrupt society.

If then continence appears useful, even necessary, in any conjugal life, something must be done to prepare for it. The cruel struggles of conscience that ravage so many homes that wish to respect the law of God can be explained in part by the lack of preparation for sacrifice and generosity. In the Middle Ages, the Church drew the attention of young couples to this on their wedding day. The texts of certain rituals provide evidence of this. The celebrated formula according to which "all is permitted in marriage" has played havoc with the education of many engaged persons. Every state of life supposes renunciation. Every state of life must practice some asceticism. Every state of life that leads a redeemed sinner to eternal life must be marked with the sign of the cross.

If young people can see continence as one of the positive conditions for the fruitfulness of their love, they will not wait for the imperious counsel of circumstance. In an act of mutual accord they will impose upon themselves the generousities which Christian conscience asks of them. They will no longer consider as unpleasant demands of an inhuman morality that which, visibly, gives depth and fulfillment to their love.

PART III

THIS IS A GREAT MYSTERY

THE SACRAMENT OF MARRIAGE

VOCATION TO SANCTITY

FIDELITY IN ALL THINGS

THE MYSTERY OF MARRIAGE

CHAPTER VIII

The Sacrament of Marriage

Throughout Christendom young couples are calling. And their cry is a veritable sign of our times.

What do they want? Dedicated to their faith, but also to themselves in their love, they are in search of a "conjugal" sanctity, that is to say a sanctity that develops in the peace and trials of married life. They want to understand this sanctity as well as live it. This effort of laymen to base their faith on intelligence, their spirituality on dogma is again a sign of the times. They insist: "Teach us the revealed doctrine that is the basis of family spirituality. We want to be nourished by truth and not by poetry. Bring us the teaching of Christ and of the Church. We ask no more. But we ask no less."

We will try to answer them. We admit that our task is not an easy one. In the first place we have to reckon with the influence of theology manuals. Preoccupied primarily with defending the institution of the Church against outside detractors and with recalling Christian couples to the necessary minimum of sanctity, they have been more concerned with sociology and morality than

with spirituality and dogma. They respond only imperfectly to the call of young couples and frequently limit themselves to tracing the general principles of Christian perfection without answering the real question: "What relation is there between human love and the love of God?"

Second, we come up against another, more serious difficulty, one that arises from the very nature of the subject we are treating: if marriage contains something of the divine, if it is a link between God and man, it is therefore a "mystery"; it is impossible to sift it through the sieve of human intelligence. However well-reasoned our analysis might be, it can never reach that element which is super-rational, supernatural. For beyond all explanation will stretch a no man's land, a "divine darkness," to borrow an expression from the mystics, that reason will never be able to break through, and where only prayer has the right to venture. But this interdiction must not discourage us unduly: a closed road is not the same as a dead end. It should rather invite us to pass from reflection to contemplation. God alone speaks well of God.

And God has told us something of this mystery. This revelation is found totally condensed in this short sentence, so apparently simple and unified: "Marriage is a sacrament." This is the case in which is enclosed the pearl without price. Let us open it for it contains more riches than all the names the imagination of men have showered upon the word love.

I. MARRIAGE IS A GRACE OF CHRIST

What is a sacrament? It is first of all an act of Christ. Behind the rites, the objects and the formulae with which

each generation has enriched (sometimes overburdened) the liturgy of the sacraments, behind the face of this priest, whose human idiosyncrasies and imperfections are only too obvious, behind all of this stands Another who blesses, who absolves, who consecrates. The person of the minister is effaced and disappears when he confers the sacrament; his dignity or indignity is then of small consequence. Christ uses this instrument, still clogged with the earth of creation, as formerly He used the mud of the roadside or the water of the river. St. Augustine, in a striking contrast, declared apropos of Baptism: "Whether Peter baptizes or whether Judas baptizes it is Christ who baptizes."

And so it is of marriage. Two people draw close to each other. They join hands; they join their souls and their lives. What are they? A strange mixture of aspirations and instincts, a confusion of stray impulses and weaknesses. What do they give each other? Their humanity such as it is, their life such as it will be—something half way between good and evil. Those who stand by and who have had some "experience" of life smile in pity at their "illusions"; they know that life is capable of dissipating even the grandest of dreams.

And they would be right were a third Person not present. For Christ Himself seals the union of these two creatures. Every marriage, as every sacrament, is conferred by Christ. It doesn't matter whether the officiating priest be a bishop or an unknown curate: for Christ marries the young couple and they themselves are His ministers. From that moment onwards everything changes. This human union, this love of clay is taken in hand by Our Blessed Lord Himself. In the struggles of each day, against everything that threatens their intimacy, the

couple will be sustained by another force—the very force that sustains the world in space—because it is also the creative force of their wills and of their love. “The strength with which I love you,” says Claudel’s Prouheze, “is no different from that by which you exist.” God has destined these two people for one another; the day on which they promise themselves to each other, He declares solemnly that such is indeed His will and that henceforward He will be at their side in the battle of life.

The luminous shadow of this mystery envelops the entire life span of the husband and wife. Christ is not only *near* to them, but *in* them; it is from the interior that He wishes to purify and ennoble every moment of their married life. Theologians speak of their “strict right to the graces of their state”; but let us not be deceived by this legal vocabulary that only touches the surface of the reality. This right is more than a certitude. It is a Presence; it is God at work in their lives.

It is difficult to elaborate in detail upon these graces which Christ offers in incessant abundance to Christian families. They are as varied as the days that pass and the love that grows. We can, however, indicate their principal forms.

Grace of Purification

Christ brings to marriage first of all a grace of purification. When we speak to the engaged of “purifying their love” they are much surprised. This is because they live for the most part in their imagination: they are to each other a kind of vision of paradise. And in one sense love is indeed a paradise. Of all human realities, it is the best vestige of mankind’s ancient joy and the best foretaste

of eternal joy; but like paradise, it must be duly merited and conquered. Its price is many blind gropings, trials, failures and new beginnings. Man's love is a wounded love as those who have lived it know well. The fever of the flesh—subject to heated passion and caprice—must be purified. The spiritual disease of egoism must also be purified for the joy of love can quickly degenerate into a demand to be served. To keep the body in its role of servant and to open the soul to the gift of grace, Christ is there—the vigilant Samaritan who binds and heals. By the grace of marriage, something of Christ is passed on to us which appeases our flesh and makes it participate in the transparency of His glorified Body, which dilates our heart and teaches it to open and give itself.

Grace of Transfiguration

This interior grace of healing and purification is not the only one. Or rather it is the germ of another grace of elevation and transfiguration. By the grace of Christ, love learns not only to conserve itself but to transcend itself. It transcends itself by total renouncement of itself and sacrifice to the other. All Christianity is mirrored in that period of time between Good Friday and the dawn of Easter Morning, that is to say in a mystery of death and resurrection. Die that we might resurrect, such is the law of Christian life; such is the law of Christian love. How entrancing and yet pathetic it would be to silhouette against the background of daily life the many deaths and resurrections in which love relives the mysteries of Christ!

To renounce one's personal comfort that the other may be happier, is to die and resurrect; to renounce the

other's satisfying presence that he might fulfill a necessary task elsewhere, is to die and resurrect. To accept the other's suffering as a condition of closer union with God, is to die and resurrect; to consent to be misunderstood, neglected, perhaps even forgotten, if this supplication merits the exceptional graces which the other needs, is to die and resurrect. Here it is not simply a question of mortifying our pride; it means even renouncing the most normal pleasure, the most legitimate and most necessary to the human heart—that of knowing and feeling that one is loved.

It is to this point that Christ leads His disciples. We must not think for a moment that the grace of marriage is a grace of comfort and ease. God does not spare those He loves. But the couples who have gone through these crises, these dark nights, know that their love is more alive for it. We have only to compare those homes in which a sluggish kind of love reigns with those where love has known labors and crucifixions to see on which side the glory lies. Even if they are not rewarded here below, husbands and wives of this calibre know that beyond the pall of death—which liberates us from our earthly tenements—they will find a total and definitive love. Daily deaths and resurrections, final death and resurrection: it is always the same mystery. The mystery of Christ, therefore, is the mystery of Christ in the home.

Grace of Fertility

A grace of purification and transfiguration, the sacramental grace of marriage is finally the grace of fertility. The word may appear banal. To want a child is the normal instinct of love. In what way does the grace of Christ

transform it? We might answer that Christ invites couples to have as many children as possible. But this is not always true (there are homes which are involuntarily sterile, others constrained to limit the number of children); even were this answer true, it would be inadequate. The call of Christ is something other than a premium on quantity.

By the grace of fertility, the *very meaning* of the child takes on a new value. To give visible form to "the one flesh" of marriage, to see this love mature into a new life, to strengthen the vitality of our country and perpetuate the community and the species—all of these things which constitute the grandeur and the natural necessity of procreation remain true of Christian love. But love adds a new dimension: for love is nothing less than *giving children to God*. An exorbitant, extravagant manner of speaking, which nevertheless expresses well the Christian meaning of generation. It throws new light on the meaning of procreation; but it throws light above all on their education. Procreation implies the education of the child; it implies bringing up a child in whom there is not only an affinity of possibilities on the natural plane, but also that other divine affinity: the grace of Baptism. Collaborators with God, co-redemptors with Christ, parents have the duty not only of inculcating in their child the sense of God, but of modeling it little by little in the image of its divine Brother by cultivating the graces of Baptism. The grace of marriage gives them the heart of God and the hands of God to fashion from day to day a masterpiece: a child like unto His Child.

Our analysis of the essential graces of marriage—purification, transfiguration and fertility—permits us to draw this conclusion: the first act of conjugal sanctity consists

in believing in these graces. In the Gospel when our Blessed Lord prepared to work a miracle, He demanded faith: "Do you believe? . . . Go, your faith has saved you." For those who pledge their troth in marriage (and successful love is also a miracle), He does not ask less: "Do you believe that I am at work in your love? Do you believe that in every instance I offer you the graces to transcend yourselves?" And when a young man and woman say "yes" to each other, they say it in all truth to Christ.

II. MARRIAGE IS AN OFFERING TO CHRIST

These last remarks lead to a consideration of the Sacrament of Marriage, not from God's point of view, but from man's point of view. For if a sacrament is the initiative of Christ, it is simultaneously, on the part of him who receives it, a visible and external act of surrender to Christ. As signs of grace the sacraments are equally signs of faith. And this second sacramental reality is not less rich in spirituality than the first. What is the nature of this "faith" in marriage? For the purposes of clarity we can sketch an answer under a threefold division: cooperation, commitment and consecration.

Cooperation

The graces of marriage remain sterile without the cooperation of husband and wife. The faith that Christ demands of us is not a simple effusion of the heart, nor a vague adhesion to principles: it is a will to act. Here we touch upon a subtle paradox of the divine plan; the appeal that is made to man's liberty, the respect that Omnipotence shows creatures is the very sign of love. If

God only wanted to be served, He need only command. But He wishes to be loved. We must choose Him; prefer Him; go to Him because we have decided to do so. "Man proposes and God disposes" is true enough. But the order of love is slightly different: God proposes and man disposes.

What is the nature of this cooperation in marriage without which the spiritual riches of the sacrament would remain buried and sterile? Must we look above and outside of married life for a superhuman perfection? Many homes seem to have made precisely this mistake and we breathe in them a rarefied air, a kind of "odor of sanctity" which puts them and us ill at ease. True sanctity is not that tension of the spirit and of the nerves that kills spontaneity. The sanctity of love is love itself. By that we mean that to cooperate with the graces of marriage it suffices (and it is, after all, very little) to love one another ever better and ever more.

Thus to strive after a greater intimacy of hearts is to cooperate; to develop the spiritual life of our partner, to bring up the children, to support our family by labor in the factory, office or in the home—all of this is to cooperate with the sacramental graces of marriage. It is good at this point to rid our minds of all false or superficial notions about sanctity. We must not complicate things needlessly. If we see sanctity as a direct and normal effect of marital love, instead of something almost inaccessible, we will get just as far just as quickly. We can say that the spiritual level of a home is measured simply by the intensity, the tenderness and the plenitude of intimacy. From the wedding day onwards, love and grace work as a team: grace invites us to a deeper love and a deeper love disposes us for greater grace.

Commitment

But this cooperation is not simply the response of each moment to the graces of each moment. It encompasses our whole life irrevocably. It is this global, unconditioned, "totalitarian" quality of human response that we call "commitment." It enters into the very notion of sacrament; for in antiquity a "sacrament" meant an "oath" and designated especially the military oath—which bound the soldier to the State for life. This meaning is still implicit in many of our sacraments, in particular those which constitute us in a state of life: Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Orders. In these, it is not only our actions, but our lives, our very persons, which belong to Christ. In marriage, it is in this manner that conjugal life—we should say the conjugal *being*—unites us to Christ; it makes us belong to Him unconditionally.

To understand the full meaning of this commitment, we should take inventory of our conjugal domain and tell ourselves: "Our bodies belong to Christ; our children belong to Christ; our home belongs to Christ; our possessions belong to Christ." Is this going too far?

Much farther even than you think because it is not only our voluntary actions, our meritorious actions, that bear the sign of Christ; it is our life, our being, *even when we are sinners*. One who is baptized or confirmed or ordained, even though he may formally desire the contrary, cannot efface that indelible mark, that "character" as the theologians call it, which has bound him to Christ. We remain forever His disciples, His witnesses, His ministers.

The same can be said for married couples. Their commitment towards Christ is measured by their commit-

ment towards each other. Nothing in their lives can escape this grace or this responsibility. They are bound to Christ as totally as they are bound to themselves. Their union bears an ineffaceable imprint; it must progressively resemble—becoming more and more perfect—the love that Christ bears them. If they stop halfway, if they settle for a “love like the others,” if they seek to divide their lives into what belongs to God and what belongs to them, they are betraying their marriage vows and it will be impossible for them to realize anything other than a mutilated and infirm love. Such love ultimately ends in the failure to realize the sublimity of the vocation to which they were called.

Consecration

In the highest dignity of this vocation, at the summit of this commitment, we reach the third level of conjugal sanctity: consecration.

It is actually not enough that the faith of husband and wife cooperate in a response to grace; it is not enough that they commit their lives and themselves unconditionally and without limit. All of this is in the service of a mission—the highest that can be fulfilled by a human being—which is the cult of adoration. To render homage to the Father, in the sense of total dependence that this word had in the Middle Ages, and to offer Him the love He has given us and which makes us live—this is the task of a man. It is certainly not the task of a slave, but of a son because there is as much love as submission, as much gratitude as humility.

The grace to carry out this most sacred of functions is given to us by the efficacious power of the sacraments.

Baptism confers upon us the right of a citizen in the Church and permits us to participate in the prayer and sacrifice of Christ. The Eucharist enables us to enter into this prayer and sacrifice (and this is the highest act of cult). Holy Orders, still more, bring us into closer communion with the Holy of Holies and empowers us to speak to God in the name of humanity. By examining thus each sacrament, we see that they all contribute to our return to God, to an adoration of love and expiation.

So too in marriage. It inaugurates a consecrated life. That is to say not only a life that comes from and lives by God, but which returns to Him without cease, glowing with gratitude, praise and repentance. By this sacrament, marriage is not only sanctified, but consecrated; that is to say, rendered apt for divine cult, just as a consecrated vessel which can henceforward be used in liturgical functions. And in this connection God has His role to play. The choice, the sign, and the mark which He places upon the person is His privilege, but this does not diminish the role of man: a will, constantly renewed, to offer to their Source the joys, sufferings and labors of love. The faith of those who ask God to unite them in marriage must go that far.

Let us add that they do not render this cult for themselves alone. Man is the priest of creation; he must offer homage for the universe. Here the liturgy sets the example for us when it incorporates into its prayer, light, music, color, incense and the elements of creation. Here, too, the sacraments, insofar as they are visible and sensible, have a meaning which we do not always see in their symbolism: that of offering to God the hymn of the world.

What is the nature of this universal function in mar-

riage? It can only be this: the Christian couple must offer to God, not only its love but all love. And from circle to circle, from depth to depth, this must indeed embrace the entire universe. It includes the holy and consecrated love of all those who love under the sign of the sacrament. It includes the sinful and errant love of those who mutilate the divine image in love. It includes the profane love, or love which believes itself to be such, but whose struggles, sorrows and hopes slowly cut a pathway for God through the hearts of men. Even beneath the human, must we not include the obscure and struggling efforts of animal instinct in the service of Life? Thus, from all corners of creation, that élan which unites living creatures unfolds in the soul of the Christian to glorify the Creator. "Laudem gloriae": a modern mystic has taken these words of St. Paul, "praise of glory," to indicate the mission to which the sacraments consecrate man and the sacrament of marriage consecrates the Christian couple.

III. THIS MYSTERY IS GREAT

When we said that marriage was an offering of the couple to Christ, and a consecration of the home to Christ, our sense of symmetry is satisfied but we haven't said everything. There remains for us to penetrate into the last intimacy of the mystery or at least to look upon the sacred shadows from the threshold.

The Sense of Mystery

To do this we must change our methods. Up to this point we have analyzed marriage to express, in the clear-

est and most rational terms, a few of its essential characteristics. We must now abandon our reason, for it can lead us no further. Here we intend to evoke more than to describe, to penetrate by intuition more than to discern by concepts. For those who are afraid of such a venture, let us remember that we also have recourse to this kind of understanding in many other domains to decipher the secret of things and people.

Such is true for the artist who sees under the dullest forms the brilliance of beauty. It is true for the lover who contemplates in his beloved "the marvel invisible to all others," as Mauriac put it. It is true for the mystic, for whom everything is a revelation of God, the footprints of His passage. It is true for all of us each time we go beyond the evidence of our senses or the reasoning of our intellects to look upon the spiritual realities—whether they be human or divine. Poetic intuition, divinations of love, the sense of the sacred—all of us experience these things more or less when the universe becomes for us that "forest of symbols" that Baudelaire spoke of. Christ Himself used this method and invited us to such contemplation in His parables: "Learn from the birds of the air and lilies of the fields. . . . A man had two sons. . . ." Thus every material or human reality is a symbol expressing some divine marvel. It is this manner of looking, this super-rational lucidity, that we must have to contemplate anew the "mystery" of marriage.

The word "mystery" means, in Christian tradition, the life and operation of God; there is a mystery of the Trinity, a mystery of the Incarnation, a mystery of the Redemption. The mystery evoked by marriage is the mystery of Christ and His Church whose symbol it is. There is in the union of man and woman something

which recalls the ineffable union of the Redeemer with redeemed humanity. This comparison is not only found in the fifth chapter of St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians (which is the Magna Carta of Christian marriage); it is found throughout the Old Testament which continually compares the relations of Yahweh with His people to those of a loving and faithful husband and a wife who is by turns passionate, volatile and repentant; it is found in the writings of the mystics who use such words as love, betrothed and marriage to describe their union with God. We do not profane the mystery of Christ by seeing it, as it were, in filigree, in the depths of human love. Rather we give the reality of human love its character of a sacred sign, and of a divine evocation.

Let us now add some precisions as to how marriage evokes the mystery of Christ and His Church.

Evocations of the Mystery

It evokes it first of all as a mystery of *intimacy*.

The great work of love is to realize a gradual union at every level: union of bodies, intelligences, hearts and activities. When a person has tried this he recognizes that it is difficult, but he also knows the joy and strength it can give. The union of Christ and His members is not less total, less difficult or less rewarding. It demands the same effort; it brings the same joy. Carnal union in marriage, so human and profane at first sight, evokes the union of our bodies with the body of Christ. We have only to think of Eucharistic Communion, the miracle of love, in which the flesh of the Son of God transfigures our flesh and prepares it for eternal resurrection.

Marriage also evokes the Union of Christ and the

Church as a mystery of *suffering*. It was upon His Cross that the Redeemer was once and for all wedded to humanity; and this bloody wedding finds a striking analogy in human experience. It is the great surprise of beginners in love to discover that they can suffer, not only one near the other or one for the other, but one by the other. Yet it is when one has humbly accepted this suffering that one begins to perceive the most beautiful horizons of love; love and suffering, love and sacrifice, love and redemption are words that will always go hand-in-hand. A family that meditates before the Crucifix sees in it a reflection of its own sufferings and thus understands better "the depth and the breadth" of the love of God.

Marriage evokes, further, the union of Christ and the Church as a mystery of *fertility*. Love knows no boundaries; it feels compelled to cry its joy to the entire universe, to share it with every living soul. From parents, it shines forth in children; from the family, it warms all those around it; from the heart of those who work, it passes invisibly into the work they create and the companions with whom they associate. Is this not the earthly image of that immense fertility of Christ and the Church (whose work of charity is without limit) which welcomes indiscriminately rich and poor, the wise and the humble and which offers always its prayers "pro totius mundi salute"—for the salvation of the whole world?

Finally, the union of man and woman evokes that of Christ and the Church as a mystery of *glory*. Family life is necessarily run through with countless worries and trials; but couples who are really united know what an inexhaustible source of joy their love is. They know that even suffering becomes the hope and the means of a purer and more total joy; they know that beyond the

weariness of this life, an eternity of love awaits them, and that they will communicate then with each other as they never could have here below. All of these joys of love and this hoped-for glory are the image of the profound and secret joy which reigns between Christ and the Church. The Church possesses her Spouse and knows that nothing can take Him away from her: this is the secret of her strength and her hope. She knows she must suffer, that she must be purified continually to offer herself the more; but she is aware of the promise of joy that is contained in this suffering. Finally, she knows that after the obscurity of her love on earth, she will meet in the light of day Him whom she loves and that she will never cease contemplating His countenance. The joy of a possession which nothing can break, the hope of an eternal contemplation in light. The Church cannot but sing when she prays.

These are not makeshift or literary comparisons. Those who think so have not yet begun to enter into their love, have never understood it. Love was given to man that he might contemplate in it a secret of God: the mystery of the marriage between His Son and men. This is the great mystery.

Initiation

Love that is consecrated in marriage is destined to fire our hearts with some of the divine charity that unites Christ with His Church. Christian marriage is not only an image, or a parable of this mystery; it is not only intended to make it better understood, but to make it better lived. It makes it enter into us and makes us enter into it. When a husband loves his wife as "Christ loves

His Church," when a woman loves her husband with that tender veneration and that loving submission with which the Church honors her Head, they realize together something of that great mystery. They accomplish the redemptive work of Christ; they are united in the same love that Christ has for His Church. When they give birth to children, when they radiate about them the love which they live, they participate in the immense mission of Christ and the Church: *they evangelize and save the world.*

The sacrament of marriage is not therefore simply a living image of the mystery of Christ and the Church after the manner of a reflection in a mirror. It not only reflects this mystery; it contains it. The union of Christ and the Church, which covers the whole scope of the created universe and which includes the whole flow of time, is nevertheless completely contained in the union of two hearts that love each other. For where love is, there also is the secret of the world. There also is the mystery of God.

We can find no better way of concluding this description and this evocation of the mystery of marriage than by comparing it with the sacrament that contains Christ in all His fullness: the Eucharist. If the sacrament of marriage in its human symbolism expresses the union of Christ and the Church better than any other, its superiority is only in its *expression*; for *communication* with the mystery itself it is effaced before the Eucharist. Here, the human heart draws upon love at its Source. Those who have renounced human love to dedicate themselves to Christ know how true this is. But here again, marriage can be the servant, the discreet and effective initiator: it leads to the Eucharist through the experience of a love

molded by grace; it calls forth the Eucharist by all that it possesses—and also by all that it lacks. It finds here what it seeks in vain in a creature—even the most saintly of creatures: an infinite gift and the fullness of life. This humility is the grandeur of marriage: “I am a promise that cannot be kept,” says one of Claudel’s heroines. But a promise is indeed something great when it leads to Him who can keep it.

CHAPTER IX

Vocation to Sanctity

Recent studies on the grandeurs and responsibilities of marriage are of a nature to inspire fear in most married people.

The revelation of the beauties of married life and the new and deeper meaning theology attributes to this vocation leads them, as it were, into a dilemma. To exalt the dignity of their state may in some cases only serve to discourage them and contradict the facts of sanctity as they know them. "Look at history," they object, "how many married saints are numbered in the catalogue of those canonized? How many spiritual authors make any reference to our presence in the Church or to our possibilities of achieving holiness? Didn't St. Paul himself let it be understood that one must remain a virgin if he is to be concerned with the things of God? Haven't we every reason to conclude that those who are seriously interested in sanctity must not marry?"

There is an answer to these sincere and confused questions. It is, in fact, more than an answer. It is a challenge! It is an urgent call to all Christian families to follow the

royal road opened by the sacrament of marriage, a hopeful call, assuredly, for grace is there at the very heart of love and nothing short of infidelity can take it away. It is an anxious call as well for there are few chosen ones, few families who even want to be chosen: too few men and women who give themselves over to the living logic of their vocation to find the charity of God, indeed God Himself, beyond and within the beautiful consecration of their love.

It is obvious that such is the will of God. We are predestined, not as citizens of a purely profane world, but as members of Christ and of His Church. "As He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and unspotted in His sight in charity. . . . In whom we have redemption through His blood, the remission of sins, according to the riches of His grace" (Ephesians 1:4-7).

The Epistles and tradition have faithfully echoed the words of the Gospel. "Be ye perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect," says Christ, and St. Paul repeats untiringly this pressing obligation of every Christian: "The will of God for you, is your sanctification." This precept is already clear in the Old Testament: "Be holy for I am holy. I am your God." The whole pastoral activity of the Church is at the service of sanctity. This is her proper mission. The administration of the sacraments, her doctrinal teaching, her juridical authority, the meting out of the redemptive merits of Christ, are the principal forms of that mission. It is for this reason that she revindicates her rights over the souls of all men. She does not baptize solely to wipe out the effects of original sin. The infant at the baptismal font must one day become perfect. The grace that is received in baptism is meant to

last, to increase until death. "Don't lose a moment," the Church seems to say to us. The momentary gesture of the priest in the baptismal ceremony implants in the human soul a germ of divine life that bears the promise of magnificent realizations.

Christian husbands and wives must understand that the day of their wedding was not a call to sanctity—of which the direct creation of the soul by God was the first step—but actually an entrance into a life of sanctity. During communion or in the quiet of meditation, we are often inspired to conform ourselves to the will of God, to begin on the long road to sanctity; but we often forget, as we look about for means to attain this ideal, that there is only one road. The fundamental work has already been accomplished. Eternal life is ours.

We might ask at this point, what is sanctity? It is the state of a soul united to God and separated from everything that is not of Him. It is continuous progress in charity. It is perseverance in that purity which is detachment from the world and that love which is attachment to God. As soon as charity takes root in the soul this twofold work of detachment and attachment begins simultaneously. But it is essentially a work of attachment. Charity inaugurates the sanctity of soul; better still it introduces this soul in the way of sanctity; it realizes a state of union. Among the "sanctified" spoken of by St. Paul to the ancients of Ephesus, we have a right to inscribe the least of the children of man provided baptism has rescued him from the uncertainties and harrowing anxieties of the world to place him forever under the seal of God's friendship.

The whole work of the Church is thenceforward to maintain and intensify the union of this soul with God

and detach it from the things of this world. In itself, grace can only increase and progress. It is the paradoxical condition of the baptized person that the degree of sanctity he possesses increases his capacity for still greater sanctity. Each sacrament, each individual grace, each gift of God renews that vitality.

The sacrament of marriage, also ordained to the sanctification of souls, adds its own exigencies and graces to those of baptism; it contains almost infinite powers. It accompanies married couples throughout their lives and its internal logic incites them to draw upon the graces at their disposal to grow closer to God. The diminution of fervor that is often felt during the first months of married life is of small consequence: a kind of inevitable impulse that is sometimes subtle and obscure, sometimes sudden, soon brings the dynamic force of Divine Life to bear on the human will. And in everything that concerns their married life, couples should attribute this pressing invitation to the sacrament that unites them.

They are responsible for each other's souls and together are responsible for the souls of their children. To enable them to fulfill these responsibilities, the supernatural strength to which the "yes" of their marriage vow entitles them, is used constantly. The encyclical *Casti Connubi* recalls that they have a strict *right* to these graces, whenever they need them to carry out the duties of their state. And these graces—let us repeat—tend each day to develop their strength and their efficacy. They are nourished by the supernatural merits of each partner. The cell of the Church, the Church in miniature, husbands and wives merit and expiate for each other within the bosom of the Mystical Body, and the horizon of their

vocation is limited only by the Christian ideals of justice and charity.

St. Thomas has something that is of immediate application here. "Just as there is a law of acceleration for falling bodies," he says, "which states that the speed of that body increases as it nears the ground, so too, those who are in the state of grace would grow in charity as they near their final end which is God." If the soul cooperates, the power of sacramental grace reveals its richness little by little; as the soul's opposition decreases, the obstacles to sanctity give way to a growth marked by God's gifts and man's faithful collaboration.

Throughout a conjugal life stabilized in God, the sacrament of marriage preserves intact in the heart of the spouses energies whose discovery will always be a source of surprise and of joy. If they obey this law of acceleration, it is impossible to imagine the limits of their holiness and their love.

But God expects us to do our part. Human cooperation in this matter of sanctity is indispensable. Unfortunately an incalculable number of couples either refuse this grace or cooperate with it only faintheartedly. "Since it is a law of Divine Providence in the supernatural order that men do not reap the full fruit of the sacraments which they receive after acquiring the use of reason unless they cooperate with grace, the grace of matrimony will remain for the most part an unused talent hidden in the field unless the parties exercise these supernatural powers and cultivate and develop the seeds of grace they have received" (*Casti Connubi*).

How does the dissipation of such marvelous gifts come about? The sad spectacle of too many unhappy homes furnishes abundant proof. The repeated infidelities to the

various obligations of married life deaden the soul of man. In the great struggle between the yeast and the loaf, God normally does not wish to triumph alone. If human love refuses to collaborate, the work of grace is paralyzed.

Most couples are aware of these truths. What they often ignore is that their docility to God would be easier and their progress in sanctity would encounter fewer obstacles if they really *desired*—with a great and constant desire of the mind, the heart and the soul—this docility of a child, this sanctity of their love. The moving confession of Bishop Hulst is an avowal of our fear: “I knew that if I prayed I could become a saint,” he said, “but I was afraid to make that prayer because I feared it might be answered.”

An obscure misunderstanding of what God expects of us imprisons many souls, otherwise generous, in mediocrity. They cling jealously to the earthly savor of their love because they fear that otherwise they will lose it altogether. Satan whispers in their ear, “God does not ask so much.” They already have enough to worry about; thus they are reluctant to accept and love the Cross because it may prove more than their hearts can bear. But without the Cross there is no sanctity. Many couples prefer a late Mass to an earlier one at which they could go to communion because then there is the possibility that the voice of Christ will be less insistent. There is a prejudice in the minds of many Catholics that love of God somehow militates against marital love.

These reservations tempt the best of Christians at times—even if they are convinced that God is at once the author of grace and the author of love. To know that happiness is the term of all our struggles and that a

greater love lies beyond the sacrifice of human love is no guarantee that a soul will not compromise and delay its definitive acceptance of God's will until the very end of life.

But sanctity pays the penalty of this fear and this refusal. Our Blessed Lord said: "He who thirsts, let him come to Me and I will give him to drink." St. Catherine comments upon these words in her *Dialogues*: "You have been invited to the source of living waters of grace. Persevere until you find Me; for I alone can satisfy your thirst. And it is through the intermediary of the Word of love, My only begotten Son that I do so. The first condition is to be thirsty."

It is useless to object that we are not worthy of aspiring to such grandeur. Let us not pretend that only the privileged can attain the heights, and that it would be presumptuous to foster such ambitions. Concerning one of the highest forms of union with God, St. Teresa writes these forceful words: "God invites everybody. He is truth itself. If the banquet were not for all of us, He would not invite us all; nor would He say: 'I will give you to drink.' He would say rather: 'Everybody may come but I will give drink to those whom I will.' Since He has invited all, all will receive of the living waters." And later, in her conclusion: "What is of capital and major importance is to have the firm, absolute and unshakable determination not to stop until the source is attained. . . ."

A certain element of mystery subsists here; for God does not distribute His graces equally to everyone. But the degree of sanctity one attains in life does not matter, provided it be what God has in mind for us. And sanc-

tity—in whatever measure—is His explicit will for all of us; the first condition is to want that sanctity.

Christian husbands and wives, be generous. Do not oppose God's will for you. Heed the call He addresses to each of you, and help one another to answer it. Be demanding for yourself and for your partner. I say for your partner, advisedly; because your destiny has been irrevocably allied to that of someone else who depends on you and needs your help to cooperate with grace. Your vocation suffers above all from a deficit of your desires and your ideals. You may complain that life is difficult, and it is. You may draw up a litany of burdens and you certainly have experienced humiliation and suffering and tears. But do not use these excuses as a pretext to hinder the voice of God from reaching your hearts. It penetrates such fragile defenses and repeats without ceasing: "Whoever you are, wherever you are: 'Come to Me. If anyone thirsts let him drink. If you love Me I will come and We will take up Our abode in you. . . .'" If your love is big enough to include God, then the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit will make of it a tabernacle of sanctity.

It would be vain, moreover, to seek perfection in another state of life. There can be no question here of envying the monks, of becoming something else, or of changing one's vocation. Certain states of life, inspired by the immediate and absolute practice of the evangelical counsels, favor union with God, but every state has its proper quality and the right to the necessary graces. God saw that His creation was good. The Redemption restores the work compromised by sin; grace supposes nature; it elevates and heals but it does not smother it. When your Christian responsibilities weigh heavily upon

you, do not lose sight of the necessity of grace nor of the dignity of this nature from which love is born. In founding a home you are obeying deep-seated spiritual and biological laws. God cannot renounce His creation, for He wishes to save it. Do not doubt your vocation: it has its origin in God's will; it was redeemed on the Cross.

There is no solution in escapism. A Christian can only sanctify himself through the Christian life, which covers every aspect of existence. As a priest I know only too well that to recall to husbands and wives their duties of state, to caution them against the temptations of evasion and at the same time to consider even the humblest of tasks worthy is the only way of bringing them to God. At first glance this may appear cruel, but the evidence is stronger: to remain faithful to the state of life in which God has placed us opens the royal road of charity. Sanctity is stability. This supernatural stability supposes that we have chosen a human vocation, and therefore that we have taken on the responsibility of our destiny, our home, our profession, and ourselves. St. Paul was a prisoner of Christ. You are too: you are prisoners of your home, of your husband or your wife, of your children, of your social obligations—prisoners of your love. You cannot save yourselves without these chains.

Dare I say that these words aren't meant only for happy homes? With all the delicacy and compassion of our heart we wish to direct them to the many unhappy homes. There are innumerable men and women who have not found happiness in marriage. Their lives are juxtaposed; their attempts at communion on the plane of spirit and soul suffer shipwreck. Each suffers the other as an unwanted traveling partner; bitterness rises, and

the doctrine of love as it is lived by countless young families is considered unreal.

It is in such cases that the tenacity of sacramental grace affirms itself. The original consent is a matter of fact; it is something that has taken place and cannot be retracted. A human home has been founded. The man and woman both entered a state of life and their vocation is a vocation to sanctity. They have a *right* to the graces of their sacrament "every time they have need of them to fulfill their duties of state." How can we admit that this grace of God, so marvelously adaptable to every human ill and capable of descending to the very depths of human misery to bear succor, can here suffer defeat? If the man and woman sincerely wish to be docile to God, nourished by Him through prayer, the sacraments and the perpetual offertory of suffering and deceptions, then their intelligences, hearts, wills and sensibilities will be progressively transformed. At the origin of every separation between husband and wife, there is dissension of each with God. It is impossible that any critical situation be not ameliorated if the two parties have recourse to the unceasing grace to which God has given them a right. Present in the home, invited by each in supplication and in hope, the Christ of "long patience" will save this unhappy love.

In the case envisaged there is still some basis of agreement: a same faith in God, a cry of two souls to Him. But often the case is more serious. With many the trouble begins with a fundamental religious misunderstanding. Then what solitude! One is alone in prayer. An immense weariness ends by coloring everything with mediocrity and despair. Many lives thus tried know well that the permanent graces of the sacrament do not cease, for all

of that, their work of sanctification. The "yes" of consent, which appears tragically derisory, holds souls in dependence upon it. Were the two partners to lead their lives far from one another, physically as well as psychologically, they would still remain responsible for the soul whose eternal salvation was confided to them.

Every sorrow, every bitter agony in the innermost recesses of the heart, each victory over the temptation to desertion, are written in the Book of Life and become for both (although on different planes—that of conversion for the one, that of growing friendship with God for the other) elements of perfection. Nothing is lost. The grace of marriage pursues relentlessly its mission. The other, however sinful he or she be, cannot escape it. It suffices only that one of the partners accept, without revolt, to have the sign of the Cross inscribed in his home.

Thus three words resume the spiritual attitude that constitutes growth in sanctity: *gift of self!* In an unhappy home as in a happy one, charity cannot save love unless the gift of God is joined to the gift of redeemed creature. Divine sanctity has no other laws: established in love, with that incommensurable stability that we cannot even imagine, God does not cease giving Himself. "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God of Hosts," we say at Mass and this acclamation associates the glory of the Creator with that universal redemption which priest and faithful relive—one supreme gift after which there is no other. The creative spirit, the spirit of love, whom we call the Holy Spirit, bears as His very name: Gift!

Consequently, this desire for perfection, for which we pleaded so insistently, must translate itself into a perpetual oblation of self. It is not enough to wish to sanc-

tify our work and our home in confiding them to God in a morning offering; it is not even enough to offer them and then suffer passively the trials that befall us. We must consecrate ourselves to the task with all our strength. Prisoners of Christ, we must give ourselves to Christ; prisoners of our home, prisoners of others, prisoners of love, we must give ourselves to love.

Only this positive and constant commitment will enable the Christian life to develop its riches and to conquer slowly everything human. The difficulties of spiritual progress do not come from the world only: nature only submits to grace by following a rhythm that is often uncertain. The spirit is more quickly evangelized than the flesh, and in the very measure in which the spirit conforms to the Divine will the flesh reveals its opacity; a certain lack of equilibrium follows. Not to be rebuffed by effort or lose courage, Christians must be profoundly united to God and to their vocation of sanctity. They must not cease giving themselves: to God, to their home, to everybody who awaits from the apostolate of the family this "communication" of love.

Thus is effected in attachment through dedication, the stability of which every man dreams and which he can find only in his state of life as a son of God. Thus too does the Church grow when each home, sanctified by the graces of marriage, feels its solidarity with other cells of the Mystical Body. Thus, too, charity, which does not set itself up against love, triumphs: a unifying force that will only end when husband and wife experience the ultimate fruit of their love in unity with God.

CHAPTER X

Fidelity in All Things

Man seeks happiness by the essential logic of his nature.

The desire for happiness is what is most profound in him. Egoism and individualism often caricaturize and limit this desire. Yet they reflect in some sense the fulfillment towards which every creature tends with irrevocable will. Whoever pretends the contrary denies one of the most evident facts of life and is guilty of a sin against the first law of nature. We cannot resist that instinct; our most discordant and even contradictory actions betray the same unflagging quest—man in search of the happiness of God.

This ontological impulse is at the basis of two of the greatest of the sacraments: baptism and marriage. Both fidelity to Christianity and fidelity to the marriage contract suppose human incompleteness, human hunger, the radical need we have for happiness. To the catechumen asking faith on the threshold of the Church in which he is going to be baptized, the priest asks: "What does

this faith bring you?" And the answer is unequivocal: "Eternal life." This, in effect, is the promise of Christ Himself. In the words of St. John: "And this is the promise which He has given us, life everlasting." Similarly, a man and a woman who love one another and who join their destinies in that love—however pure their love, however passionate each is for the joy and security of the other—obey this same appetite for fulfillment. Each wants to make the other happy, but, more or less consciously, they want to be happy themselves. It is impossible that they should not want it.

There are obviously important differences between the two sacraments in question. But both are rooted in an identical hope. We can never forget that Christianity is a religion of happiness. Through the Cross, by the Cross, and for the salvation of a great number, the dogma of life proclaims a pathetic waiting for glory to come.

Too, both baptism and marriage mobilize all the resources of human psychology in the service of this common hope. They not only have the same origin in the heart of man, but their manner of expression is similar. In both cases, one consents. Either he says "yes" to God or to another creature. Although the individual's consent has nothing to do with the essence of baptism (which is accomplished in the application of water to the body, as St. Thomas points out) we must take into consideration the preliminaries of this sacramental gesture. There is a close connection between the sacrament and what precedes it. Moreover, the motives of the catechumen must be known to the priest.

In several instances of the baptismal ceremony the candidate is interrogated. Each new step in the proces-

sion that leads from the doors of the church to the fount, is marked by a series of questions. In the case of a child, the godparents (whose singular and magnificent responsibilities are too little understood) answer in his stead, and its incorporation into the Church of Christ is not realized until after the solemn recitation of the Credo. This is because entrance into the Christian way of life supposes knowledge and a free act of the will, a tendency of the whole being towards an end clearly seen, adhesion to the means of salvation—in a word assent to God from Whom we ask life.

Marriage, on the other hand, consists essentially in the exchange of consent. There is no real distinction between the sacrament and the contract. The Church is therefore careful to see that all of the conditions of this consent are present. Thus it is that the contracting parties are veritable ministers of the grace they give to each other.

In both baptism and marriage we see that the redeemed creature consents! He consents, on the one hand, to God—to a way of living, thinking, and acting that will assure happiness in respect to God's will and a violent rejection of the pomps of Satan; and on the other hand, he consents to another creature, weak and prone to sin like himself, but placed under the seal of divine friendship. And in consenting to this other he commits himself to the way of living, thinking and acting that this love imposes.

These two "fiats," ratified each day in the spontaneity of joy and of bitter struggles, are the tablets upon which the history of Christian fidelity is inscribed.

When the catechumen presents himself before the door of the Church, he asks for faith. This is his first question. And in answer he receives "this virtue of

faith," says the Catechism of the Council of Trent, "which in some manner penetrates us in Baptism," which gives us "strength of soul that is the beginning of eternal life in us and which makes our minds adhere to what is not evident" (St. Thomas IIae, 4, 1), and the "substance of realities hoped for" (Heb. 11:1). The same Catechism notes that the first good of marriage is the family and adds that the second is faith—not the supernatural virtue of faith of which we have just been speaking, but "that mutual faith which binds the husband to his wife and the wife to her husband so closely that they give themselves totally to each other, with the promise never to violate the sacred alliance of marriage." Our English word "fidelity" has rather a restricted meaning. The Latin term *fides* is stronger. It is habitually employed in religious literature to refer to either the theological virtue or to the bond of conjugal intimacy.

There is more here than a simple similarity of words. It seems to us that both consents are made "in faith" and that a comparison on this level would be useful. The preliminary definitions we have already recalled will enable us to avoid clumsy blunders. If we now center this comparison about three essential points we will find an exceptionally rich source of meditation and thought.

1. When we say faith, we say lack of evidence, expectation, investigation. The Christian in whole-hearted search of eternal life does not see God more than anyone else, in the strict sense of the word *see*. However consuming his desire for happiness and however certain he may be of having chosen the only way of salvation, he is incessantly confronted with obstacles. And the lack of evidence for the divine reality in which he believes is the first hurdle he must surmount as he sets out on

his spiritual adventure; and it is still a major difficulty as his journey draws to a close.

Through the redemptive grace of Christ we enter into the company of the three Persons of the Blessed Trinity, but mystical experience itself will not lift the veil from the face of God. The most docile and ardent of contemplatives must remain a *believer*. It is with envious nostalgia that he recalls the burning confession of St. John: "What we have heard, what we have seen and contemplated with our eyes, what our hands have touched . . . we announce to you."

On another plane, the essence of God is not more evident for the philosopher who demonstrates His existence. However profoundly our intelligences understand the object of our love, it is an object that remains radically estranged from our ability to grasp it. In the whole closely knit texture of the physical universe there is no opening that does more than postulate an Artisan, no rent that permits man to behold His countenance. In the moral order, evil and suffering join forces and the working of Providence is seen only by those who have attained the fringe of light beyond the opacity of the mystery. Later we will trace out the zones of clarity that suffice, even from the point of view of reason, to justify our faith. We shall consider first of all, and summarily, the shadows which are the first term of comparison.

But is a comparison possible here? Can this suffering and blind groping be translated into any kind of concrete simile? Mystics endeavoring to translate the torments of their union with an invisible God, have always borrowed their language from the vocabulary and the reality of conjugal love.

We might do likewise with profit. In marriage there can be no doubt of the physical presence of the other and the eyes of love can drink their fill in all confident security. Yet a great mystery subsists. It does not take the perception of a great mystic but only an ounce of attention to discern the limits of marital union. The man and woman are two in one flesh, but they remain two; each retains his individuality. The incomprehensions and dissatisfactions that arise from this fact are of small consequence. The real problem lies much deeper than these inevitable conflicts and arises from the experience that the unifying force of the highest passion cannot render totally "communicable" a person who, by his very nature, is not. In psychological terms, let us say that the "other" will always remain an enigma and sometimes affirms himself more and more as such with the passage of time.

This is sometimes a discouraging discovery for married people, but it is one that must be faced realistically, for sooner or later it will cast shadows upon the refulgence of the most admirable intimacy. The common efforts of a whole family, however demanding and generous they may be, are powerless to dispel this veil. The more couples know and love each other, the more they must *believe* in the person loved, in his incommunicable reality, in his hidden richness, in that inexhaustible treasure that is nourished at the very well-springs of creation. Indeed in the measure that we love and know, in that measure must we believe.

2. This first point of comparison remains somewhat abstract. A much more concrete obstacle has opposed itself both to union with God and conjugal union from the early dawn of humanity. This obstacle does not

affect the essence of the human condition but it is nevertheless written in every page of its history. Its daily repercussions are immense and have no other limits than those assigned to it by the Redemption of Christ. And that obstacle is sin.

The progress of the believer is constantly contradicted by evil. Anarchic tendencies riddle his will and tempt it away from the influence of grace; the crushing seduction of a thousand idols overwhelms us; repeated sin deadens the force of our good intentions; a kind of sense of futility poisons our affective faculties—St. Paul suffered because there were “two laws” within him. Our intelligence is similarly undermined: Satanic voices persist in obscuring the validity of spiritual values; the Cross becomes a scandal and a folly; the things that reason cannot justify by its proper light lose their supernatural character and become unreasonable. The magical charm of what is purely human scoops within its narrow confines anyone who begins to doubt the eternal. Grace can be lost, unfortunately, and the vows of solemn consent can be broken, or at least rendered impotent, for such is the risk of a union with God that depends upon faith—the perpetually menaced faith of a poor sinner.

The accord of wills and intelligences in married life experience the same form of crisis. As descendants of Adam and Eve we are always coming up against the limits of inter-penetration of creatures. Between married couples, sin introduces a permanent principle of rupture and even apparently modest shortcomings are far-reaching in their harmful effects. Because of the effects of sin, wills set themselves against each other, for the role of evil is to dislocate, to separate, to tear asunder. Souls become at certain times impermeable because the same evil

exacerbates individual personalities, marks out their differences, fires their egos and snuffs out the faint circle of light that has been found after much struggle. Then the suffering of an enigma is not something in the outlying regions of experience, on the fringe, as it were, of the fabric of love, but it is something which pervades everything. A frightful doubt then makes its presence felt. Have I made a mistake? Will this thing work itself out? Shouldn't I seek happiness in something else, if not in someone else? Fed on the deceptions inherent in this way of life, the imagination wanders off into greener pastures and the curtain of dark fear falls on what was once a beautiful love.

We are not referring only to the obviously disruptive manifestations of mortal sin such as adultery, impurity, anger, injustice, tyranny and pride. The strategy of evil is more subtle. That such flagrant sin attacks the very foundations of conjugal faith either by completely breaking the bond of consent or by diminishing its quality, is evident. But to sin against God, independently of each other, is not less disastrous. If the guarantee of the conjugal bond is divine grace, each time that life is extinguished, each time that the soul of one or another of the married persons falls from the state of grace, the strength of love is weakened. Married couples cannot love each other with all the richness of their sacrament when the main-spring of their love is paralyzed. Man is not divided. If in his professional and social life, he shows himself dishonest, greedy, merciless, then God will no longer be at home in his heart. Experience with souls drives home this truth to every priest. Every sin is a sin against love.

3. Other obstacles to divine friendship, in the realm of faith, arise each day from the very circumstances of our

Christian life. We cannot deny that the atmosphere which we breathe is pagan. Instead of finding in institutions, in the framework of our social life some support in his journey towards eternity, the Christian is much more likely to find just the contrary. The world is Satan's accomplice. It is useless to insist upon that point unless it be for the purpose of underlining the nature of the conquest which faith must revindicate. This is especially true in our day when covetousness of the flesh, the eyes, and a mad scramble for wealth set themselves against the realities of the invisible with frightening conviction. St. John compared the Christian soul to a battlefield when he wrote: "For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world. And this is the victory which overcometh the world: our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?" (I John 5:4-5).

The sacred state of marriage is exposed to the same attacks. It is involved to the very end of life in identical conflicts. The personal sins of either of the partners undermine their love; that love must also protect itself from the multifarious enemy that is the sin of the world. We cannot overemphasize the importance of family missionary activity through real and efficacious infiltration into the heart of a dechristianized world. Nevertheless we must be wary of the slow erosion that operates through literature, conversations, films, the cynicism of some, the scepticism of others, deceptions and suffering of heart and soul. The inspired writer who repeated untiringly, "Little children love one another," terminated his epistle with a note of inquietude: "Keep yourselves from idols" (I John 5, 21). This "fidelity in all things" which the Church asks husband and wife to promise on

the day of their marriage, cannot survive the vicissitudes of each day except with the grace of God and the whole-hearted cooperation of those who love each other.

With a great number, unconsciously perhaps, a shifting of values, compromises, cowardly actions and a kind of subordination of their ideals to the ready-made judgments of a social environment, dissolve the basis of mutual faith. Little by little the dignity of the body is lessened and the blame for this or that betrayal is accredited to "physical passion" which, after all, is inevitable. Husband and wife then merely live together without any profound intimacy and rationalize their empty life in the name of practical impossibility of a total life in common.

It is here perhaps that the deleterious influence of the world is felt more effectively. "Fidelity in all things," the priest asked at the altar and the Encyclical letter of Pius XI insisted on that fidelity in urgent terms. If marital fidelity and a mutual respect of bodies—faith of chastity, as St. Augustine puts it—are present, the depth of marriage is much greater. What is needed, Gustave Thibon tells us, is "absolute conjugal unity," and therefore "the efforts of a whole lifetime of a habitual intimacy, of a society." He or she who believes that this communion is possible and who strives constantly towards it without ever sinning against love or hope, has conquered this world.

We have merely suggested the obstacles to the two "faiths" which we have analyzed. The subject is immense: we have only sketched its general contours by means of three successive comparisons. But if such shadows do exist and such obstacles are present, how can faith subsist, either in the believer or in the soul of the

married person? What assurance does either have of the perenniality of their consent? In other words, under what conditions is faith viable?

Faith will be viable if total cooperation between God and creature is established—a conjunction of the treasures of the supernatural with the resources of everything human. Grace on one hand, and the intelligence and will of man on the other, are convoked to that meeting ground where salvation is worked out. Then there is nothing in us that cannot be enlisted in the success of this cause, nothing incapable of serving the interests of this enterprise.

CHAPTER XI

The Mystery of Marriage

Few Catholic couples live the full Christian reality of their marriage.

A great number of them restrict their married life—as, for that matter, they restrict their whole Christian life—to a moral plane. They accept the responsibilities that the sacrament gives to marriage together with the mode of behavior dictated by the law of Christ. They submit to a Christian sociology of marriage. But all of this remains very exterior, in spite of the generosity, the authentic integrity, and sometimes even the heroism which such demands suppose.

Now the Christian reality of marriage is fundamentally of the mystical order; it must be lived, to correspond to Christ's intention, on a mystical plane, taking its motives from the very reality of Christ, and its strength from the faith that binds us to Him. In these pages, I would like to develop this truth. Perhaps some among you will interpret my words as a kind of accusation, forcing you

to admit the distance that separates the poverty in which you have lived your marriage until now and the richness to which you are nevertheless called. May this accusation, if such it be, be an invitation to reflection. It is never too late. I have known couples who at an advanced age have discovered the rich meaning of marriage that had never been explained to them as it should have been, couples who had never meditated upon their vocation—at once divine and human—either before or after having entered it.

Marriage is a sacrament. We must bear this in mind to discover its mystical reality. Too often we limit ourselves to an inadequate and abstract idea of marriage: a means of grace or a means to have grace. To re-evaluate the meaning of a sacrament, in view of applying it to marriage, I here propose two lines of reflection.

The Sacrament Is an Act of Christ

Every sacrament is an act of Christ. It is not first of all a thing, and too frequently we think of it as a thing. In the sacrament, an action of the living and resurrected Christ is communicated to transform us and assimilate us to His own vitality. When the Church lives her sacraments, when I am the subject of a sacrament, Christ Himself acts with His heart and with His liberty. He gives Himself to me with all of His power, His love and His freedom and the great personal interest He has in me. Christ addresses Himself to me through His Church to act in me. This idea is most clearly seen in the Eucharist, but it is not only true of the Eucharist. We can say of all the sacraments that they are acts of Christ touching us personally, person to person. This is the first

reflection that should be brought to our attention if we wish to have a very living and a very concrete, and the only true idea of the sacraments.

*A Sacrament Is an Adaption to
Human Circumstances*

The second reflection I wish to propose answers a question which you have perhaps already asked: Why are there seven sacraments, since it is always the same Christ Who gives Himself to us? Actually, from Christ's point of view, there is only one sacrament and it is Himself—the sacrament of the living God. But from our point of view, there are different circumstances. And Christ is not only interested in our souls but in our whole life. He reaches us and seeks to touch us and transform us in our concrete situation, in the whole scope of our human existence. And human existence is a multiple thing; it is made up of diverse circumstances and experiences: of life and death, suffering, love, loneliness, joy and work.

These are the broad categories of human experience which men of all times in a variety of expressions must know, if they are to remain men. In these experiences the whole person is engaged. Hence Christ's action unites in us this diversity of human situations, which may be transitory or permanent, and the sacrament will be the ritual expression of this union. On the one hand we have a living act of the resurrected Christ communicating something of His own vitality to us, and on the other hand the concrete circumstances in which we live, the elements of our existence which we offer to Christ that He might complete them.

All of the sacraments can be understood in this per-

spective. Penance, for example, takes us in our experience of weakness, in our consciousness of mendicant and sinner; the so-called sacrament of Extreme Unction—which should be called the Sacrament of the Sick—helps us in the situation, not of death, but of sickness in order to give the suffering of our bodies a Christian meaning. Likewise the sacrament of Marriage takes us in the most total and most sacred of all human experiences, that which most resembles what God is since God is love.

It is also the most fruitful of all human experiences because love implies the maximum dedication of persons. It is not astonishing that, if Christ wished to sanctify all of human existence, He gave particular attention to the privileged situation that is the love life of man. Out of this situation He has also made a sacrament. It supposes the fully human quality of love: not simply a desire, nor a passion, not even a sensitive conscience, so easily illusory, of communion, but the sustained decision of a permanent gift of self and the will of total consecration of two people to each other.

A sacrament is, then, a ritual act, an act of Christian cult through which takes place the union of Christ's power with a given human situation. Such is the sacrament of marriage: Christ assimilating Himself to the human situation in which we are placed by the consecrated gift of our life. For those who have faith, nothing could be more real or more concrete.

*A Sacrament Is a Participation in the
Mystery of Easter*

These reflections on the sacraments can be summarized by saying that every sacrament constitutes a participa-

tion in the paschal mystery of Christ. Every sacrament is a paschal sacrament. I mention this point because we are actually experiencing the Church's renewal of paschal fervor and a synthesis must be made of all the sacraments under the paschal angle. What precisely, does "paschal angle" mean? It means such and such human reality, through Christ, passes from its purely human consistency to its eternal consistency, as Christ Himself passed with His human nature from the world of Time into the world of Eternity. This mystery is renewed each time the Church celebrates a sacrament. Christ accomplishes His Easter among us and incorporates in His Easter and His Resurrection all of the human realities He touches and which we offer Him.

This is not only true of Baptism and the Eucharist. In the act of every sacrament and in the life determined by it, the mystery of Christ is assimilated to a human reality. Day after day, in small as in large things, in all human experiences, Christ subjects Himself to the elements of our life, not to destroy them but to consecrate them and raise our whole existence to the level of a mystery. Mystery is not understood here in the same sense given by the catechism: "That which cannot be understood, that which we must accept . . .," but in the sense of St. Paul: namely, a reality which according to appearances is only human but which in truth is already an eternal reality because Christ is present in it as a principle. It is thus that human love becomes a mystery. Christ lives in this love; He transforms it, gives it a new meaning, and ennoble it with the pale of His own resurrected life.

Just as Christ, in passing through death, synthesized all suffering in His supreme sacrifice of love, so too the "Easter" of Christian couples must pass through the suf-

fering of egoism and sinful sensuality, of common trials and perhaps even doubt of their love. But this death is only apparent since it is already invisibly animated by a love that is victorious. Such is the effect of every sacrament. If, indeed, a sacrament is the union between the vivifying power of Christ and a given instance of human experience, then this experience will become in itself *interiorly* Christian.

Here Christ's words are realized: "When I am raised on the cross, I will draw all things to myself."

The Mystical Reality of Marriage

In the sacrament of marriage man furnishes a human reality: his love. It is furthermore a consecrated love, that is to say, a love that has taken the form of a contract and which implies a decision taken to give oneself in faithful commitment. A contract without love would constitute a morally deceitful alliance; love without the expression of a contract would not be sufficient to meet the conditions of the sacrament.

Now Christ did not found marriage; He founded the sacrament of marriage. Marriage existed before Christ came and it is a reality which is at once personal (since it implies a communion of love between two people) and social, because it is a human experience which is, as an institution, important to society. Thus marriage is simultaneously a personal experience and a social reality. In all ages marriage has been sanctioned by feasts and celebrations. These were often religious in nature, even outside of Christianity, and this religious quality indicated the mind of the people who held marriage as a sacred moment in the life of man. In raising marriage to the

dignity of a sacrament, Christ sanctified both the love that burns in the hearts of those who exchange vows and the external institution that is an expression of this love in the life of society.

Christ joined this double reality in the unity of a single mystery that human love be no longer simply human, but that it might become veritably and interiorly an eternal love—a love which Christ intensifies by His Presence—and that the social expression of this love be no longer simply a natural institution assuring the propagation of the human race but a cell in the Kingdom of God. Unfortunately too many Christian couples never penetrate beyond the threshold of their sacrament. When I interrogate them on what they think of the sacrament of marriage, I have the impression that they think it is a blessing of God at an important moment in their life, much like the blessing one invokes when leaving on a long journey. But in truth it is a question of something much deeper and more real.

For Christ is present interiorly to the human reality of love and its social expression; we pass from the moral and religious dimension of marriage to a dimension that is mystical in the sense in which early Christianity used the word—"That which was lived in Christ." Evidently, over the years, this vocabulary has singularly changed. For us, "mystical" evokes extraordinary states of life, exceptional vocations which remain inaccessible to ordinary people of only minor talents. Our modesty is such that we dare not apply the epithet "mystical" to ourselves. But our modesty is far too great. Mystical means that which has an interior relationship to the mystery of Christ or that which denotes a real degree of intimacy with the mystery of Christ. It is as simple as that, even

though it remains difficult to live. It then becomes easy to think of Christian marriage in that light; the experience of human love and the institution of human love, having been taken in hand by Christ in His sacramental action, become veritable divine realities, a vital part of the mystery of Christ. Those who are married can say: my love is part of the mystery of Christ; Christ has enveloped my love and my home with His mystery.

Let us now consider what consequences the sacrament of marriage has on human love and the social cell which issues from it. For in Christ both our personal life and our social life become associated with the Kingdom of God. A human institution becomes an institution in the mystical and social Body of Christ. While the personal dimension of the Christian mystery of marriage has to do largely with the consecration of mutual love which two people have for one another, the social dimension leads us to a discovery of marriage as a community reality, as an element of the Church. Just as, on the human plane, consecrated love fructifies on a collective plane to give a valuable cell in the sociological order (a family cell which is a human institution), so too, on the supernatural plane, these two elements of the mystery introduce us into the sacrament of marriage. The personal dimension, which is the love of two people, becomes one love in Christ. The social repercussion of this sacramental love, the sociological aspect of marriage, then becomes a dimension in the Mystical Body of Christ—a reality in the Church.

Marriage As a Permanent Sacrament of Love

It is important to insist upon the permanent quality of the sacrament of marriage. Human love is an enduring

situation. It is a situation which of its very nature does not end. In the sacrament of marriage Christ has subjected the permanency of human love to Himself. That is why the sacrament does not exist simply for the instant in which the consent is manifested publicly; it remains actual for the duration of married life. We can see immediately the importance of this for the husband and wife: each day, although not explicitly in words, they must repeat the "yes" of their wedding day. They must repeat this "yes" in the gift of themselves, in the events that fill each day of their lives. The sacrament of marriage lasts as long as the state of Christian love—it is a permanent sacrament. Its permanency is such that couples should not say they are faithful to the vows they made ten years ago, or twenty years ago, but rather to the gift which they continue to make of each other today in their sacrament.

The permanent mystical effect of this sacrament is twofold. This double effect will be manifest in us if we keep alert. There is always a danger of stagnation in marriage, a temptation to come quickly to the peak, like a pendulum, and then stop. That the effects of the sacrament of marriage may become a living reality of their lives, married couples must always retain the lucidity and freshness of the first weeks of their marriage.

The first effect is that Christ gives Himself to each partner through the medium of their love. This may appear strange if we do not recall that human love is the means which Christ uses to give Himself. Christ gives Himself to the wife through the love of her husband and to the husband through the love of his wife. He gives Himself to both through their mutual love. To phrase this in a slightly different way, the love of couples, if it

is lived in Christ, is the condition of Christ's presence and their sanctification. This is not a gratuitous affirmation or a broad generalization. It is the very reality of things.

After saying that Christ gives Himself through love, we must add—and here we come to the second permanent effect of marriage—that the husband and wife as ministers of their sacrament give Christ to each other. Thus the home becomes a unit in which the chief means of sanctity is a mutual love that is never retracted. As long as their love endures, although it does not always have to be sensibly experienced, as long as it is never renounced, then in spite of all difficulties, all temptations, all trials, they will continue to love one another with the faith they have in Christ and He will give Himself to them in this love and they will be the ministers of their mutual sanctity in Christ. A double permanent alliance: such is the paschal signification of this permanent sacrament in the personal life of husband and wife.

*Marriage in the Church:
"The Order of the Conjoined"*

So much for the personal dimension of marriage.

The second dimension of the sacrament of marriage must be considered in a sociological perspective. For if the sacrament places the couple in a state whereby each sanctifies the other by their love (since Christ has sacramentalized this love), then this cell will find its proper place in the Mystical Body of Christ, in the Church. Because we too often remain bound to an individualistic notion of the Christian life, this dimension is usually overlooked by couples, even by those who understand

the extent to which Christ infuses, transforms and consecrates their love. Thus it is that they do not adequately understand how they are literally the basic cell of the Church and how, by their mutual love, they assume a responsibility in the Church.

I personally regret that we have lost the beautiful expression repeatedly used by the early authors of Christianity: "The order of the conjoined." When these authors formulated the different functions and responsibilities in the Church, they spoke of the order of bishops, the order of priests, of various other orders and they spoke of the "order of married people," designating by that expression a cell which had its proper place among the People of God: a ministry which, in the sacred sociology of the Church, is constitutive. Thus are Christian homes constituted through the permanent sacrament of marriage with a social responsibility, and the cell which they form has a real ecclesiastic dimension. Those who are married are part of the vast hierarchy which constitutes the Church; they are of an order which has its dignity beside the sacerdotal order and the religious orders. And this order of the married is not one to be taken lightly. What, more precisely, is the nature of this order?

The Home, Mature Cell of the Church

Marriage usually marks the beginning of life's responsibilities. It is only as adults that we are capable of such responsibilities. Until our lives have been rooted by these responsibilities, we remain children or adolescents. Marriage invests us with adulthood and a profound attachment to the Church. One of the external signs of this is the fact that we begin to think of becoming parishioners

when we marry. Before, we are kind of apprentice parishioners. I find it altogether natural that young people without any serious burdens in life make very mediocre parishioners: they are not connected with the concrete realization which is the Church; just as, individually, and on the human plane, they have not entered into the sociological reality.

This sacrament assures the social dimension of Christian life in the Church. Indeed the sacrament gives a veritable meaning of Church (and St. Paul refers several times to the home as a Church) to Christian marriage which we must not forget under the pretext of emphasizing home life. The ceremony of marriage is in truth a feast of the Church. The whole Christian community should participate in it and rejoice, for every wedding adds something new to the Church. But the reality of the family as a cell is only the first aspect of this dimension of Christian marriage as a mystery in the Mystical Body of the Church. The second aspect constitutes a veritable ministry in the Church. Christian husbands and wives are not only a mature cell in the Church, but they must *act* in the Church. This is not an optional choice, something they can do when and if they feel inclined, but an obligation.

The Home: An Education in the Faith

Their first obligation consists in making their home a center of Christian education—a small community of faithful. Too many homes are not sufficiently aware of their responsibilities in this matter. They do not realize that the family is the first Church of children and that priests and the public institutions of the Church can

never replace this elementary ministry with which parents are charged. If the family is not a matrix in which children grow up in the faith after having been engendered, if it is not a living school where the children are not only transmitted certain Christian principles but mature organically by receiving a "maternal" education in the faith, then everything else is compromised.

I think it is largely because of the abdication of families in this education (and hence their lack of awareness of the social implications of their sacrament) that we have so many formal Christians in the Church; so many Christians who have committed to memory a few fundamental ideas but who never received an education in their faith, who have been baptized but who never grew up with parents who exercised this very fundamental ministry. No priesthood can substitute for the failure of the home because the children find the Church in their families before they find it in the parish. They must live the Christian life in the community that is the home. Otherwise they risk not living it at all.

The Home as Center of Christian Worship

The second obligation incumbent upon parents is to make their home a center of Christian worship. The Church is not simply a place where we manifest our faith in Christ. It is a community in which the rites of the liturgy are exercised and where Christian people gather to pray. The Church is a community in prayer. Since the home is the cell of the Church and since it shares in the social and public responsibilities of the Church, it must promote this spirit of prayer. All the pagan religions had their domestic cult, their god of the home. In Christianity,

Christ becomes the Christ of the home and when the father of the family presides, for example, over evening prayer—the prayer of the little Christian community that is the family—he fulfills a sacerdotal role. Indeed here he exercises in a privileged manner the royal priesthood of the laity because he is charged with offering to God, in thanksgiving, the life of those confided to his responsibility, of this human community whose chief he is by virtue of his sacrament.

The Home as a Witness

A third obligation of the family consists in making the Christian home a center of testimony to Christ. The Church is always a missionary community, a community which is a presence in the world to announce Christ and to manifest Him. Likewise, the Christian family must be in the world as a presence of Christ, a home which bears witness to Christ. It is thus that families will accomplish their great apostolic and missionary responsibility which the sacrament of marriage imposes upon them. The deep love of home life united in Christ constitutes, in the pagan atmosphere of our times especially, a sign of Christ's presence in the world.

Because of these three ministries which every home must exercise, Christian marriage is a real entrance into the public life of the Church. When we enter the Church together to realize the institution of Christian marriage, we become citizens of the Church as we never were before.

Conjugal Love—A Sacramental Necessity

In terminating, I would like to point out certain exigencies that Christ calls you to live in your consecrated love.

The first exigency of Christian marriage is certainly to love. This may appear banal, but its importance cannot be exaggerated. When love is no longer authentic, nothing is left for Christ to consecrate. His Easter no longer has dominion. To love is the first duty—and one scarcely dares speak of duty in this respect—of Christian husbands and wives.

Reviving an Awareness of Mystery

A complementary exigency is to revive an awareness of the mystery that is lived. From time to time we catch a glimpse of the depths of love, but for the most part our lives are only too external and superficial. This is also true of marriage. There are perhaps many who tell themselves: I have never touched this depth of the sacrament of marriage. I have lived honestly; I have fulfilled my obligations; I have remained faithful, but I have never had this consciousness of being united with Christ in the totality of human reality lived personally and socially.

If this is so, then it can only be because they have not constantly renewed the consciousness of the mystery of their love in Christ. Christian couples must look two ways: upon their love for each other and upon Christ who has lifted their love up and subjected it interiorly to His love. We must always be in contact with Christ through faith and at the same time be conscious that His love lives in us. What is most lacking to us is this faith in the Christian reality of marriage.

It is not always easy to live thus on the moral plane, to do certain things and avoid others, to live in conformity to a definite ethical status which we have imposed upon ourselves. But it is still much more difficult to live the sacrament of marriage as a sacrament each day and

every minute. This demands that we be wide awake, lucid, that we pay attention to what we are living and know that we carry within us a great mystery, that we do not render our love prosaic. It demands that we do not reduce our marriage to simply the greatest human experience, and that we possess this realistic awareness that only faith can give us.

In a very certain and profound way our love no longer belongs to us. We must become deeply convinced that our human love belongs to Christ and to His Body which is the Church. We can never revive an awareness of this mystery in ourselves mechanically; nothing is more harmful to our spiritual life than lukewarmness and superficiality. The clear-mindedness which couples have on their wedding day and which gives them the courage to overcome the fear they feel and resolve to give themselves to the sacrament of marriage, must continue. The circumstances of conjugal life will often be an occasion to meditate upon the mystery which must animate them: an invitation to return to the sources of their faith.

Such a Union Is Indissoluble

The consequence of Christian love lived in conformity to its sacramental reality is clearly that such a union must be indissoluble. Perhaps this is too frequently taken for granted. Here, as everywhere else, we must understand *why* it is indissoluble. It is not only because of the human reality in love. It is true that human love, if it is deep, aspires to endure indefinitely and there is already a desire of eternity in all true human love.

But we know that this love is fragile and subject to sudden changes. This is so true that to found the indissolubility of marriage on the human element of love,

however admirable and deep it might be, would be a practical impossibility. Nor is the indissolubility of Christian marriage founded uniquely upon the sociological consequences its dissolution would imply. Too frequently we stress this motive in the hope of being more convincing. Since these are human motives which do not involve faith, we imagine that we will be better understood. But they are insufficient motives for a Christian. It is true that we can prove that the indissolubility of marriage assures greater happiness for the children, although even this isn't always true. We know of many cases where experience has proven this reasoning false.

But what experience can never prove false and what really constitutes the fundamental reason, essentially mystical, for the indissolubility of marriage, is its interior Christian signification. It is really because Christ is one. Just as Christ loves His Church, indissolubly with one love that is never retracted, just as He is faithful to death itself, so too, Christian couples must be, as Christ was, faithful until death, whatever it costs, in spite of the difficulties, the temptations and the daily contingencies of married life. I do not say they must do this to imitate Christ (for imitation remains exterior) but because Christ relives in them His own love of the Church. It is in this sense that we must interpret the text from St. Paul: "Just as Christ loved His Church, that He might sanctify it, so too must you love each other." We have no other model of human love than the love of Christ for His Church. The unity that is in Christ dictates the indissolubility of Christian marriage and fidelity unto death.

In what we have been saying you have undoubtedly recognized the life you have been living for some time,

and in the measure that you recognized it as an accusation, there is something lacking to your marriage. Love demands the quality of being a veritable gift and not merely sensuality or asceticism.

It demands above all faith and I am afraid that there are many Christian homes where the husband and wife love one another—adequately and quite correctly—but only from a human point of view, with human fidelity, with human honesty. Faith is missing. If such be the case then some among you must yet be converted to Christ, must begin to really take Christ seriously in order that the seriousness of Christ become the seriousness of your sacrament of marriage. I think that a conversion to Christ, an understanding of the seriousness of our faith is necessary to those couples who were married, exactly as to those who were baptized. They were baptized in a given sociological milieu; consequently they were married in a given sociological milieu. But between the two, between their baptism and their faith, no conversion took place; there was really no option of Christ, no absolute recognition of His Lordship and His Power over all human flesh. Their marriage cannot enjoy its full measure of perfection. It is proper, sincere and exteriorly passable but its soul is missing. Just so, the priest must always return to the initial faith which alone gives meaning to the sacrament of marriage.

If Christ is not a living presence, then the sacrament can only be ritualism, an external form, a blessing that we ask to get God on our side. If Christ is not a living presence, then marriage is not that reality which begins one day and ends only with death, that daily reality of the greatest of human experiences, already lived in a dimension of eternity, in union with the Easter of Christ.

APPENDIX

SYNOPSIS AND DISCUSSION
QUESTIONS

PART I—THE HEIGHT AND THE DEPTH

Chapter I. *The Scope of Marriage*

SYNOPSIS

Our first attitude toward love and marriage ought to be one of understanding. Love cannot be rightly understood as a sentiment or just another activity of man. Nor can marriage be fully defined as a social institution or a mere association of interests. Marriage must be seen as a mature expression of love—as a love that has become conscious of itself in a dedicated form of life. The notions of love and marriage cannot be separated.

This consecrated love is the central reality of life. It is the highest vocation of man. Everything in his life ought to converge towards this focal force of love. For only through this force can our personalities crystallize and develop. By centering all of our activities into one total act of offering, love gives unity to our lives. By drawing us into the service of another person who needs us, love traces out our life's mission.

Married love not only gives unity and purpose to our lives. It also permits us to transcend ourselves in the interests of another. It completes our lives. This human fulfillment is possible only in marriage. For only in marriage (excepting, of course, the consecrated love of a religious vocation) is that deep exchange of values which elicits the highest human qualities of both man and woman possible. A man is more a man because a woman lends the strength of her love to his work. A woman is more a woman—

greater source of life, of strength and of beauty—when her personality is anchored in that of her husband. The complete human being is the couple.

It is also within married love that human fulfillment blends into supernatural fulfillment. For marriage is a sacrament. That is to say, God's grace becomes mysteriously united to human love in suchwise that the increase of one effects the increase of the other. Whatever brings a man and wife closer to each other, brings them closer to God. The highest relationship between the sexes is a spiritual one. The union of man and woman in marriage is the symbol of God's union with mankind.

When married couples perceive the extent to which they are committed and involved in a spiritual adventure, they can better understand the full scope of their love. They can, first of all, understand that their love gives conscious expression to the blind forces that move the universe. Their love is in line with the groping affinities of the inanimate world; it crowns the obscure forces of sentient life; it is a free expression of biological instinct. In their love, a man and woman become part of the great creative urge that runs through all of the universe. As Germain Flammand writes: "In giving themselves to each other they fall in step with the rhythm of the universe."

Married couples can, furthermore, understand the immense social implications of their vocation. The family is the basic cell of society. This is primarily true because marriage can give one thing no social institution can give—and yet which every social institution needs: *love*. The family is the source of love. It generates those spiritual forces such as an understanding and respect for others, the ideal of service and a sense of the sacred values that unite men and subsequently, through the children, pumps these forces into society.

A society that cannot depend upon this source of vitality withers in violence and solitude. Unless the love that is

communicated from heart to heart in the sanctuary of the home influences society, the purpose of life becomes horribly vitiated. When the sense of love disappears, the meaning of both God and man is lost.

Just as the family is the cell of society, so too is it the cell of the Church. The love which the Church endeavors to disseminate into the world is cultivated first of all in the family. The harvest of Charity in the Kingdom of heaven will be in direct proportion to what the family has sown in the heart of the child. That is why the greatest hope of the Church today is the apostolate of the family. Unless the family is Christian there will be no apostles to answer the call of supernatural love. Unless the family is Christian there will be no Christian world.

Thus all of life—human and divine—enters into the notion of love. We can measure the success of our lives and the strength of our personalities by our success in love. Upon this depends our personal happiness, our social influence and our spiritual progress.

QUESTIONS

1. What are some modern attitudes towards love and marriage?
2. In what way does married love include the universe itself?
3. What is the family's unique contribution to society?
4. Point out how this contribution is lacking in modern American society.
5. What is the order of dependence between the Church and the family?
6. What practical steps can be taken to intensify love?

Discuss:

1. The greater a man is, the deeper is his love.
2. Love gives unity and purpose to life.

3. The complete human being is the couple.
4. The highest relationship between the sexes is a spiritual one.

Chapter II. *The Splendor of Human Love*

SYNOPSIS

Love in marriage can be distinguished from other kinds of love. The three basic characteristics of this love are: first, it unites two people of different sexes; second, it unites them irrevocably in view of a common good and the foundation of a family; third, it is a sacramental love.

We may note also that the love which attracts a man and a woman derives from a deeply human appetite. It is, furthermore, a love of choice which can be at once disappointing and idealistic.

It can be disappointing because illusions to which love tends to give rise cannot withstand the reality of married life. Where two people are concerned there can be no total communion. In every satisfaction lurks a sentiment of unfulfillment. This love is idealistic because those who share it nourish the hope that this gift they share will lift them above the trials and tribulations of the workaday world and carry them back to the freedom and innocence of Eden.

For a mature grasp of what constitutes love in marriage certain dangers must be guarded against. The first danger is that of egoism. Two people who love each other can be just as selfish as one person who loves himself. Another danger is that of reaching satiety in marriage—a too-sudden realization that human love is not a panacea.

One effective antidote to these dangers is the realization that love is not an escape from the world. This new society which a man and woman begin in marriage does not sever them from others. They cannot renounce their ties with other people. Rather they must understand that, far from isolating them, their love binds them more closely to the past. It also opens a door on the future.

Married couples must always be in a state of expectancy. They await the arrival of their children. They await, too, the consummation of their love in heaven. In the meantime they grow more deeply aware of how closely their love joins them to God. They develop a keen sense of God's presence in their love for each other.

At this point is discovered another antidote against the dangers that threaten their marriage. For couples who are aware of the spiritual dimension of their marriage will gradually understand that their vocation is subject to God's law just as their union is a reflection of God's love. With this awareness, they will assume the cross of married life and anticipate whatever difficulties they will later encounter. This will give a depth, purpose and joy to their love that cannot be attained on a purely human level.

A third antidote against the dangers that menace love is a sensitivity to the differences between man's love and woman's love. Man's vocation places him at the distracting crossroads of the world. Woman's gift of herself is not harassed by the pull of exteriority. She does not experience man's mental reservations, his doubts or his impetuous egoism. Yet in the silence of her heart she suffers them. Her presence is a reminder to man that no exterior activity can disrupt the interior strength of their love. She continually draws him back to the spiritual sources of their love.

Such is the range of conjugal love. It aspires towards the heavens and is chained to the routine of time. It lifts husband and wife to a new level of hope and yet involves them in the torments and conflicts of this life. All of this the

Christian couple accepts in the gift of themselves to each other.

With a mature realization of the nature of their love, they are prepared to set forth on life's journey. With vision, patience and prayer they fashion the masterpiece of a home and prepare for an eternal reward. Over the years the flame of their love grows brighter; they perceive the image of God in each other more clearly; they grow more interiorly present to each other.

The final splendor of human love consists in this that the bond of love issues forth into the broad stream of Divine love.

QUESTIONS

1. State and elaborate upon the three characteristics of conjugal love.
2. Note some "practical" examples of the disappointing aspect of love. Is an "idealistic" attitude a solution to this?
3. What point is the author trying to make by his reference to the play *Polyeucte*?
4. What part does the Cross have in married life?
5. Discuss the nuances of love as it is found in husband and wife in relation to their family life.
6. Draw up a point by point plan of the advice you would give an engaged couple.

Discuss:

1. Man and woman aspire to constitute together a perfect society.
2. Love is not the whole of man and woman's life.
3. A man and woman who freely choose one another are united before God.
4. The dialogue of husband and wife cannot be interrupted, even when they are physically separated.

5. Whoever wishes to accomplish a work that is fruitful must have in him a large measure of vision, patience and prayer.
6. Perfect marriages have no other history than that of happy people.

Chapter III. *Unity in Marriage*

SYNOPSIS

The first chapter discussed the broad implications of marriage. Marriage was seen as a unifying state of life which involved both the individual and the community, the human person and the religious person, society and the Church.

This chapter narrows the discussion to a more detailed examination of the unity that ought to exist in marriage. Greater unity among husbands and wives means greater unity in society; and greater unity in society is the basis for greater unity of all with God. In this way would be realized Christ's great prayer: "That they all may be one, as though, Father, in me, and I in Thee."

The sources of division in marriage are basically three: when marriage is a union of two egos instead of a vital fusion of two complementary personalities into one "we." Secondly, when one personality is so completely absorbed by the other that there is neither two egos nor one "we" but only one dominant "I". Thirdly, when the union is effected in such a way that two personalities are so diffused and compromised as to result only in a weak and ineffective "we."

The qualities of mind necessary to this pursuit of union are—the firm conviction that this is a difficult undertaking,

the equally firm conviction that the basis of this union is a preference of the other's needs over our own personal independence and the resolution to share our *whole* life with our partner. This means that husband and wife must work *together*. They must be sensitive to the needs of the other. They must constantly seek to overcome apathy and routine that threaten this union. They must confide in and be perfectly frank with each other. Both must realize that the union they are striving for is a conquest that must be attempted again and again. They ought never be content with what they have gained but always endeavor to attain a yet higher union. Above all, both parties must have unflinching faith in the graces of their sacrament which are far stronger than the divisive forces operating against them.

Finally, this unity must be sought at *every* level of marriage—physical, psychological and spiritual. This union does not imply identity. On the contrary, each partner must continually enrich his own personal life. The stronger each personality, the greater is the possibility of union that can exist between them. The levels of union may be classified as follows:

1. *Union of Activities.* Our activity is part of ourselves; it conditions very deeply what we are and what we are striving towards. To be disinterested in the activity of the other is to be disinterested in the other person, and ultimately, in ourselves. This union of activity must be born of circumstances that imply mutual self-giving.

2. *Union of Bodies.* This union comprises a basic harmony between the initiative of man and the submission of woman. Man must not be domineering; woman must not be merely passive. Neither can effect marital union. Where this harmony of bodies is realized it becomes a strong incentive to union of hearts and souls. It is also the source of abundant graces.

3. *Union of Characters.* This union grows out of the differences of character in man and woman. It also includes

defects of character. Faults are not to be loved in themselves, but the other must be loved to the point where his faults set up no enmity between union.

4. *Union of Hearts.* Man and woman do not love in the same way. Neither can expect to be loved as he or she loves. Yet both have a radical need of one another. Patience and gentle frankness is the surest guarantee that these differences will blend, sometimes through misunderstanding and frequently through suffering, into harmony. It is especially in the common love of children that this union of hearts is established.

5. *Union of Tastes and Sensibilities.* This union provides many new ways of seeing, feeling and understanding persons and things. This exchange is a basic source of happiness in the home. The rule-of-thumb in achieving union of tastes is not to impose our likes on the other, but to find what we enjoy together. Choice of friends is one good example of this union.

6. *Union of Wills.* Marriage is two wills joined together. Husband and wife must be united on essential things first of all. The secret of this union is to have a common objective: to want the same things from life and from marriage. The end we pursue makes us what we are. Serious difficulties can be encountered in this respect, due to the marked difference between masculine and feminine personalities. There is real danger of one partner yielding to the other in pursuit of the union of wills. This can only lead to disaster. The stronger personality ought always play an educative role towards the weaker.

7. *Union of Intelligence.* Neither partner has the right to become isolated in his or her specialty of thought. All intellectual discovery must be shared. Some common intellectual activity—reading, for example—is one means of reaching this union. But there are multiple others. A home in which there is no common intellectual and artistic endeavor quickly falls prey to boredom and self-centeredness.

8. *Union of Souls.* The primordial rule here is that each partner develop an intense personal life with God. From this individual sanctity will develop a common, conjugal sanctity. When this spiritual union is achieved, husbands and wives will know the deep joy of giving God to each other. One example of this common spiritual activity is the effort married couples make to bring the God who animates their marriage to others—particularly their children.

QUESTIONS

1. How does Christ's prayer, "that they all may be one as we are one," apply to marriage?
2. What are the divisive forces that tend to destroy unity in marriage? In what ways do married couples fail to realize this unity?
3. What qualities of mind are necessary as a preliminary step towards union in marriage? What are some practical ways of cheating in this respect?
4. Union in marriage can be achieved on many different levels. Consider the following questions:

How much should a wife be interested in her husband's work?

Should conversation at dinner be about their mutual activities of the day?

Would vacations together, evenings out, be of any help?

What effort should a husband and wife make to understand and satisfy the sexual needs of the other?

What value would there be in husband and wife studying personality differences between the two sexes—list some of these?

How can these differences be made to contribute more to married life?

Would serious discussion of religious subjects be one way of achieving a deeper union in marriage?

Discuss:

1. Unity as a divine dream and union as a human dream.
2. Full personal life is necessary for marriage unity.
3. To love someone is to love that person as he is and not as we would like him to be.
4. Marriage is two wills joined for the purpose of service.

PART II—TWO IN ONE FLESH

Chapter IV. *The Personality of Woman*

SYNOPSIS

Woman occupies two worlds: one above man; the other below him. From one point of view she is closer to nature; from another, she is closer to spiritual values.

Woman's function of childbearing makes her more conscious of the great creative rhythm of nature. She participates in nature's mysteries of life. Her whole manner of acting marks her as one who is instinctively allied with the rhythm of the universe. Man's attitude toward the cosmos is rather marked by a spirit of objectivity. For him, the world is an object of science and activity. There is less mystical unity between man and the universe.

From another point of view woman is more spiritual than man. She possesses an intuitive faculty of grasping the spiritual reality of things more quickly than man. She is more sensitive to the spiritual forces that govern the world.

We must not see any contradiction in these two apparent extremes of woman's personality. Nor must we maintain that this distinction between man and woman is absolute. It is a valid working technique and explains the conflicts that arise between them.

The two worlds of biological and spiritual life become clearly distinguishable in woman when she is called to give herself. There are profound differences between the manner in which man and woman give themselves. These differences are illustrated in the spiritual order where we see man's vocation as one of fulfilling the work of redemption—as Priest, King, and Artisan—whereas a woman experiences primarily a personal relationship with God—as Virgin, Bride or Mother.

Woman's gift of herself in love always retains a strongly personal note. It is always directed towards an individual. This is seen in marriage where woman plays the role of wife-mother—that is, a role in which the attention she gives to her husband and children are expressions of her unique gift of love. A woman is not a wife and a mother. She is both in the same gesture of love.

As such her influence must not be limited to her family circle. The married woman has a vital social role. And she is most likely to exercise a good influence on society in her capacity of wife-mother. Then, she can complement man's work and direct her attention to those—the weak, the persecuted, the neglected, etc.—man most frequently overlooks. This activity will center and complete woman's personality.

Woman's personality can only be fully understood in a spiritual perspective. The wife-mother in her relations to man reflects the relations between humanity and God. This might be described as the specifically religious mission of

woman. "It is as though her presence awakens in us a nostalgia that carries us beyond her physical beauty and her loving heart and puts us in contact with a higher beauty and another heart," writes P. Parrain. "The charms and physical graces of woman are like signs that are reflections and reminders of their prototypes in heaven."

Woman's abandon, submission, humility and dependence are those humanity must manifest before God. Thus the wife-mother is an apt symbol to express the attitude of humanity before God. This symbolism is further strengthened by being placed in the broader symbolism of Mary and the Church—both of whom are wife and mother in a superior sense. Woman's religious mission is greatly aided by the dispositions of her personality—a distinct advantage she has over man. The man who penetrates deeply enough into the heart of his wife will discover new spiritual perspectives.

There is another aspect to woman's personality: for if she is a symbol of grace, she is also a symbol of sin. Through woman sin entered the world. She can still be an extremely effective instrument of Satan. Woman can refuse to follow the impulses of her femininity and turn them back upon themselves. Then what is noble in her is perverted and she becomes an agent of perversity. This is fundamentally a refusal to give herself. And a selfish woman is of precious little use either to man, the world, or God.

Our society bears eloquent testimony to modern woman's sin of refusal. The woman who seeks to be adored is no longer an inspiration to man but becomes his accomplice in evil. This kind of woman still retains her power of fascination, but it is now enlisted in the cause of seduction. We must add, that woman is not entirely responsible for this. Man, too, has contributed to her sin.

Hence woman stands in history as a symbol of salvation or a symbol of damnation. She cannot be mediocre. Her great potential must serve a cause. Instinctively, her mission

is a religious one. Only through perversion can it become Satanic.

QUESTIONS

1. How account for the fact that great religious rites and myths have always associated woman with life, nature, earth?
2. Does this chapter suggest that woman is either inferior or superior to man?
3. Is woman's carnal role opposed to her spiritual role? Explain why her nature is more mystical than man's.
4. Are the complementary aspects of man and woman realized only in marriage?
5. What are the differences in the way a man and a woman give themselves to each other? to their life's work?
6. How does a woman correctly "mother" a husband?
7. How does woman's role of wife-mother carry beyond the family circle?
8. What is the religious lesson man learns from woman?
9. What above all is the sin of woman?
10. Why is the mystery of woman essentially a religious mystery?

Discuss:

1. Woman occupies two worlds: one above man, the other below him.
2. Her mission is to have no mission other than her husband.
3. The married woman has an indispensable social role.
4. Woman's relationship to man is an exact parallel of humanity's relationship to God. Discuss:
 - a. the Old Testament symbolism of the chosen people as the bride of God

- b. St. Paul's marriage symbol of Christ and the church
 - c. woman's symbolic role of God-Mother.
5. A woman who refuses to be a woman is of no use to her home, to the world, or God.

Chapter V. *The Man As Father*

SYNOPSIS

A father's threefold responsibility is to give life, to reflect God's fatherhood and to transmit divine life to his children.

1. Giving life is not to be understood in the limited sense of the physical act of procreation. It is a continuous education. A father must be in every instance *creative*. If he ignores this fact only an exterior relationship will exist between him and his child. This labor of fatherhood includes the temporal management of his home as well as cultivating a spiritual atmosphere. Because he is the head of the home, this responsibility devolves upon him primarily.

In such a climate the father exercises his authority. This must be done with love, with the intention of creating a quality of receptivity in the child and, always, with the intention of reflecting God through his fatherhood.

2. The source of all paternity is the Fatherhood of God. In this sense human paternity is an image of God's paternity. Our Lord, who frequently spoke with reverence and love of fathers, did not hesitate to see in them a reflection of the love of His Father. "Be ye perfect as your heavenly father is perfect" is primarily a precept for fathers.

In this capacity, a father is in a privileged position of initiating his children into the mysteries of God. He ought especially, by his deep interest in them, the confidence he inspires in them and his continual gift of himself, inspire in his children a basis for the virtues of faith, hope and charity.

Such responsibility elevates the role of fatherhood to great dignity. Failure here amounts to a grievous crime, for it destroys the foundations of faith and equals a betrayal of God.

3. As the image of God, it is part of a father's vocation to be instrumental in transmitting grace to his children. To do this he must draw copiously upon the grace of his state of life, imitate the example of Christ, and remain close to the sacraments and prayer.

Only fatherhood thus exercised gives reign to all the potential and all the aspirations of manhood. Who is not a father, is not a man; who does not accept the vocation of a father fully, with knowledge and love, is not completely human.

The mother's cooperation is essential to a full deployment of fatherhood. He cannot be a father alone: the child is the fruit of mutual love of a man and a woman. Her patience, intelligence, tenderness and love are subtle reminders to him of what the splendor of fatherhood must be. In the final analysis, a father is the creation of a woman's heart.

QUESTIONS

1. What are the three principal responsibilities of a father?
2. How is the act of generation perpetuated through fatherhood?
3. What is the relationship between: *authority*, *love* and *submission*?
4. What was our Lord's attitude towards fatherhood? Cite some instances from the Gospels.

5. How can a father form the basis of faith, hope and charity in his children?
6. What is a father's role in transmitting grace to his children?

Discuss:

1. Education is a prolonged creation.
2. A man is not fully a father unless he wishes to be the head of a race.
3. Fatherhood is a revelation of God's paternity.
4. The father must practice the "virtue of transparency."
5. A woman's masterpiece is a father.
6. A father must be a man of prayer.

Chapter VI. *Life Through Love*

SYNOPSIS

The greatest joy of parents is to give life. It is at once a privilege and a problem.

It is first of all a privilege because it is a participation in God's creative power and the whole mystery of being. To give life is to justify love; it is to safeguard love by increasing it; it is, in point of fact, an act of religion. For parents see in their child a soul called to be a saint. They cooperate with God in preparing saints. Couples who have shared this privilege know what a liberating power it is. They know that fruitfulness crowns the mystery of love; that it alone can give to marriage all of its moral, human and religious significance. It draws them inwards and upwards, closer to one another and closer to God.

But this power of giving life is also a problem. No Christian worthy of the name denies the sacredness and the nobility of a new life. He is ready to welcome children into his home. But how many? On this point hang immense difficulties. They are difficulties that most young parents are experiencing today. For some it is a source of excruciating doubt and torment; for others it brings about a weakening of faith and loss of interior peace. It is a complex problem that must be squarely faced.

Three virtues must guide us in an analysis of this problem. The degree to which married couples possess them will determine their success in coping with the responsibilities and ambiguities of rearing a family in modern society.

The first of these is the virtue of abandon. The question of a family is not a matter of mathematics. It is a matter of virtue. Large families, in the final analysis, are based upon the virtue of abandon or hope. Indeed it is foolhardy to bring children into the world without this trust in Providence. Married couples who understand the far-reaching implications of this virtue, understand at the same time that they are committed to a life of sacrifice and generosity. They have taken Christ at His word and thrown themselves upon His abundance. They believe that God will not embarrass them. They realize that the number of children they have depends solely upon the strength of their love.

But this does not solve the problem. Another virtue is necessary—that of *prudence*. The modern world's conspiracy against families is little short of the diabolic. There is a question of lodging, for example. Apartment dwellers here encounter a real obstacle to a large family. Or the question of finances. A husband frequently finds it humanly impossible to support many children on his salary. There is also a question of health. Many women cannot stand the physical strain of repeated pregnancy.

In such cases prudence demands that couples space their children. Where another child would constitute a real

threat to the harmony of the home, prudence must intervene. And Christian prudence will indicate one of two things: either absolute or periodic continence. This is a difficult alternative and may well throw parents into a state of revolt. But it is well to remember, as R. Pons writes in this article that "fruitfulness is not only of the body. A father and mother are never through giving life to their children. If they must renounce calling new souls into existence, they are freer to give more attention to those they already have. . . . This task of the education of their children is one that is noble enough and complex enough to occupy them totally. It assumes a union between them just as precious as physical union, of which it is, after all, the consequence."

A final virtue is necessary for a complete solution of this problem: the virtue of *heroism*. The problem under discussion is an acute and painful one. There is no easy way out. Parents are ultimately driven to heroism: either the heroism of accepting a large family, or the heroism of justly limiting their family. The only other solution is a calculating egoism that cheats both the natural law and God. It is this virtue of heroism that adds the final dimension to the mystery of love. All love is heroic.

Those who do not accept the Christian code of morality will see no problem here. It is pointless to argue with them; still more pointless to envy them their ease and comfort. A Christian who abdicates before the demands of heroism is not even worthy of the ersatz happiness of those who refuse heroism.

Because of the conditions in society which conflict with the ideals of Christian marriage, young couples must be thoroughly prepared for the state they are about to embrace. A comprehensive program of instruction before marriage is one of the best means of avoiding problems after marriage.

QUESTIONS

1. Does this chapter suggest that the golden mean of not too much and not too little is to be applied in deciding the number of children in a family?
2. State in your own words the privilege and the problem of fruitfulness in marriage.
3. Why does the problem not exist for those who do not accept the Christian code?
4. Has any effort been made by theologians to determine just how many children are required of a couple to fulfill their share in perpetuating the human race?
5. Is sympathy always for the mother, rather than the father, in a large family? Is this justified?
6. How do the virtues of a) abandon, b) prudence, and c) heroism contribute to a solution of the problem?

Discuss:

1. Each home is an island that must answer for itself.
2. Divine prodigality follows upon human generosity.
3. If a father of twelve is privileged it is above all because he has met a valiant woman.
4. Once a certain degree of spirituality has been attained . . . then there is place for continence.
5. There is heroism in a justified refusal to go beyond an average family.

Chapter VII. *The Flesh and the Spirit*

SYNOPSIS

Some currents of Christian tradition would seem to deny the body its rightful role in marriage. But the totality of Christian life teaches rather the contrary. It affirms that the flesh must also be redeemed.

The Christian teaching concerning the body takes into account three facts. The first is the fact that man is body and soul. There can be no real opposition between the two. The second is the fact of sin. This reality can set up a conflict and disharmony that may take some time for the individual to overcome and which may create a false sense of values in some marriages. But a third fact must enter into consideration: that of Redemption. The graces of redemption have an uplifting and ennobling effect upon the body. St. Paul stated the high dignity of the body when he said that it becomes, through grace, "the temple of the Holy Ghost."

Thus Christianity profoundly respects the nature and laws of creation. It cautions us at once against the dangers of inordinate demands of the flesh and also against any form of "angelism" that would tend to relegate the body to a level of insignificance in the hierarchy of human values. It affirms that the flesh is not sinful, but it can be made an instrument of sin. Everything depends upon the meaning we wish to accord it. With these clarifications in mind, we can understand the qualities which the conjugal act should show forth.

Rightly used this act can become highly meritorious. St. Thomas affirms that the act of marriage is honorable, that

it is moral, and that it is in itself, in its intrinsic finality, that it finds this honor and this morality. St. Augustine taught the same thing. Pope Innocent XI confirmed these doctrinal affirmations. The conjugal act is not an animal but always a human act.

It must therefore be 1. *A spiritual and free act.* That is, sex is not merely an outlet for the caprices of instinct, but the soul must express itself through the body. If there be no spiritual communication between the persons, what should be a human act is frighteningly vitiated. Such an exercise of liberty demands education. Constant vigilance must be maintained to prevent this act from defeating its purpose. Patience is also necessary, because it may be some time before perfect harmony is achieved in this act. Attentive respect and a certain self-forgetting are also necessary to offset the danger of egoism or precipitation which stand as obstacles to marital happiness.

2. *An act of love.* More than freedom or patience, this act is a work of love. Without love it cannot be the magnificent gesture of intimacy and fruitfulness willed by the Creator. As an expression of love, the conjugal act becomes a hymn of praise to God. The redemptive graces of Christ are here indispensable. For the graces of the sacrament of marriage increase love by healing its wounded nature and by deepening its quality with all the resources of Divine Charity.

3. *A meritorious act.* This follows from what has been said. The conjugal act is charged with tremendous spiritual significance when it is accomplished in conjunction with the order of grace. It cannot be stressed too much that this quality is achieved only with effort. Only gradually, and under the purifying effects of the sacraments and the graces of a Christian way of life, will this evangelization of the flesh be finally completed.

When we understand the proper use of the conjugal act, we are in a better position to understand the role of con-

tinence. Before this problem there are three possible attitudes we can adopt. First, the laws of conjugal chastity can be ignored; second, continence can be accepted in a slavish, grudging manner; and thirdly, the true value of continence can be grasped in the broader perspective of what Christian doctrine teaches about marriage.

Continence in marriage, like the conjugal act itself, must serve the ends of love. J. Madaule points out that when parents accept continence generously, in the spirit of the Cross, it can be offered for the salvation of the children God has already confided to their care. By thus disciplining their bodies, parents participate in the redemptive work of Christ as well as enhance their own love.

Continence also serves the ends of love by acting as a check against the routine a too-constant use of marriage rights tends to produce. Married couples normally express their love through the use of their bodies. But abstinence from this use permits them to find other, and sometimes deeper, means of expression.

QUESTIONS

1. What are some facts to be taken into consideration in the Catholic view of sex?
2. What two extremes must be avoided?
3. How can use of sex be a source of grace?
4. Under what conditions may married couples resolve to practise perpetual continence?
5. What are three possible attitudes toward birth control?
6. How does continence in marriage profit the children? the parents?
7. What can be done to prepare young couples for continence?

Discuss:

1. Christianity does not give the flesh its rightful place, but suppresses it.

2. "Do you not know that your body is for the Lord and the Lord for the body?"
3. Everything depends on the sense that man consents to give to the flesh.
4. The conjugal act must always be a human act.

PART III—THIS IS A GREAT MYSTERY

Chapter VIII. *The Sacrament of Marriage*

SYNOPSIS

What is the relation between human love and divine love? This question leads us to the proper sacramental nature of marriage. The answer to it can be developed under three headings: marriage is a grace of Christ; it is an offering to Christ; and, finally, it is a mystery.

1. Marriage as a grace indicates the active part Christ plays in marriage. Grace must here be understood in the deep sense as an *action* of Christ. That is to say, through the sacrament, Christ operates in marriage. He is present in every marriage. He draws two people close to one another. He seals their union. He shares in the joy and suffering of marriage as much as the spouses themselves.

The graces Christ brings to marriage take three principal forms. He brings first of all graces of *purification*. He purifies human love. He subjects the excessive demands of the flesh and erases the marks of egoism that all human love bears. Through this grace, something of the dignity of Christ's glorified body is conferred upon the bodies of married couples.

This grace is the germ of a second grace: that of *transfiguration*. Marriage is not a vocation of comfort and ease. Christian couples are constantly called upon to transcend themselves through renunciation and sacrifice. Every marriage must mirror the period of time between Good Friday and Easter Sunday. This is the law of Christian life; it is the law of Christian marriage. The mystery of Christ therefore is not really distinct from the mystery of the Christ who operates at the heart of marriage, transfiguring it with His grace.

A third grace is that of *fertility*. This means more than Christ's invitation to couples to have children. Through the grace of fertility, the very meaning of the child is changed. This grace gives to marriage the mission of giving children to God. Parents have the duty of modeling their children upon the image of Christ—their divine brother. The grace of fertility gives them something of the heart of God and the hands of God to fashion from day to day a masterpiece: a child like unto His child.

2. Marriage as an offering to Christ indicates the collaboration parents must bring to these graces. This offering also takes three principal forms. First of all, the form of cooperation. The graces of marriage remain sterile without the cooperation of husband and wife. To cooperate in this sense means, basically, that couples must love one another ever better and ever more. Any effort they make to achieve greater intimacy, harmony and happiness in their home is to cooperate. From the wedding day onwards, love and grace work together: grace invites us to a deeper love and a deeper love disposes us for greater grace.

Secondly, marriage as an offering to Christ is a form of *commitment*. In the radical sense of the word 'sacrament' means an 'oath'. In antiquity it referred specifically to the soldier who bound himself to the State for life. In the Christian context a sacrament binds us to Christ. In Christian marriage, a couple commits themselves totally and ir-

revocably to Christ. Their bodies, their children, their homes, their possessions—their all belongs to Christ. They are bound to Christ as closely as they are bound to themselves. Thus their love is truly Christian only insofar as it is directed towards Christ and insofar as it endeavors to return to Christ the love He bears towards them.

Thirdly, marriage is a form of *consecration*. It is not enough for couples to cooperate with grace; it is not enough that they commit themselves to Christ. There is a third level of conjugal sanctity: that of consecration. Marriage inaugurates a consecrated life. That is to say not only a life that comes from and lives by God, but which returns to Him without cease, glowing with gratitude, praise and repentance. On this role of consecration, the authors write beautifully: "The Christian couple must offer to God, not only their own love but all love. And from circle to circle, from depth to depth, this must indeed embrace the entire universe."

3. In an attempt to define marriage as a mystery, we reach the highest meaning of marriage. Mystery in the fundamental sense in which it is used here, means the life and operation of God. Marriage, as a mystery, evokes the mystery of Christ and His Church. This symbol runs all through Scripture and mystical writing. Marriage evokes this spiritual reality in four ways. First as a mystery of *intimacy*. The great mystery of Christ and His Church is that all souls be gathered into the unity of the Father. Conjugal life reflects that ideal by seeking total union at every level of life. Secondly, as a mystery of *suffering*. It was upon the Cross that the Church was wedded to Christ; it was upon the Cross that mankind was redeemed. Marriage must reflect that painful union. When couples suffer for, through and by one another, they begin to perceive love's depths. Thirdly, as a mystery of *fertility*. The fruitfulness of marriage resembles and evokes the inexhaustible fertility of Christ and His Church pouring forth love and

grace upon mankind. Fourthly, as a mystery of *glory*. The Church, through the trials and sufferings of time, will know the joy and peace predicted by the Apocalypse. Christian marriage must reflect that immense hope. Couples must proclaim unflinchingly that the joy they know at present is but a faint promise of the happiness that will be theirs in heaven.

These parallels are not arbitrary or makeshift. They are rooted in the very nature of marriage and the Church. For both are rooted in the mystery of love. "When a husband loves his wife as 'Christ loved the Church,' when a woman loves her husband with that tender veneration and that loving submission with which the Church honors her head, they accomplish the redemptive work of Christ; they are united in the same love that Christ has for His Church."

This mystery is indeed great. Marriage not only reflects it; it also contains it. For where love is there also is the secret of the world. There also is the mystery of God. This mystery is further elucidated by a comparison with the Eucharist. For in this sacrament is found an infinite gift and the fulness of life. Marriage's inferiority to the Eucharist is one of its greatest honors. For no other sacrament approaches that gift and that life as does marriage.

QUESTIONS

1. In what sense is the sacrament of marriage a "presence of Christ"?
2. What do we mean when we say that grace purifies marriage?
3. How does marriage reflect the mystery of Christ's death and resurrection?
4. How does the grace of marriage affect children?
5. What are some practical ways for married couples to cooperate with grace?
6. What is the greatest responsibility of married couples?

7. Compare marriage with the union of Christ and His Church. Draw up parallel points.

Discuss:

1. Marriage is not a grace of comfort and ease.
2. The first act of conjugal sanctity consists in believing in grace.
3. Married couples are bound to Christ as totally as they are bound to themselves.
4. Marriage inaugurates a consecrated life.

Chapter IX. *Vocation to Sanctity*

SYNOPSIS

Marriage can be briefly summed up: it is a vocation to sanctity. Father Carre writes: "There are too few men and women who give themselves over to the living logic of their vocation to find the charity of God, indeed God Himself, beyond and within the beautiful consecration of their love."

Sanctity is the obvious will of God for all of us. Sanctity must be understood as the soul united to God and separated from everything that is not of Him. It is continuous progress in charity.

Baptism initiates us in this way. Marriage adds still further responsibilities. It also gives the strict right to graces of state. These graces enable couples to draw closer to God together. They furnish new sources of energy and higher motives for living a full life.

Most couples could make more progress in sanctity if

they sincerely *desired* to become saints. There is a fear and a mistrust on the part of many that holds them in mediocrity. There is a prevailing attitude that love of God is somehow in conflict with marital love.

Another serious impediment to sanctity is a lack of generosity on the part of married couples. They manifest a form of escapism that never permits them to answer fully God's call to sanctity. At the origin of every separation between husband and wife is a separation of each from God. On the other hand, if they desire sanctity, and give themselves generously in pursuit of it, they cannot not become saints.

This remains true even of unhappy homes. True even of broken homes, in those cases in which one of the partner's has lost the faith. Through sorrow and discouragement and unhappiness, the grace of the sacrament is at work.

One simple axiom provides the secret of conjugal sanctity: *gift of self*. God gives Himself ceaselessly. That great gift must be returned by creatures. There is no other law of sanctity. Marriage offers a unique opportunity for this vocation. In no other vocation do occasions for self-giving present themselves in such varied multiplicity.

QUESTIONS

1. What is the will of God for married people?
2. What should it mean to a Catholic couple in today's world to know they have a *right* to the infinitely powerful graces of the Sacrament of Matrimony?
3. Point out the implication of the "law of acceleration" applied to the spiritual life of marriage?
4. What is one to think of married persons who look for roads to sanctity outside of their own state in life?
5. What are basic facts of the marriage vocation even for unhappy homes?
6. What is there to be said about a marriage in which one

of the partners makes a "gift of self" and the other does not?

7. Explain God's part and man's part in the living out of the marriage vocation?

Discuss:

1. The day of their wedding . . . is an entrance into a life of sanctity.
2. Husbands and wives merit and expiate for each other.
3. Sanctity is stability.
4. Married couples are prisoners of love.

Chapter X. *Fidelity in All Things*

SYNOPSIS

Marriage has already been compared to the Eucharist. This chapter endeavors to throw further light on marriage by comparing it with the sacrament of Baptism.

There are important differences between the two sacraments. But there is one very important similarity: both sacraments are based upon the deep-seated human desire for happiness. Both sacraments suppose human incompleteness. Moreover, the sacraments of Baptism and Marriage have a similarity of expression. In both cases consent is required: in one case, consent to God; in the other, consent to another human being. In both sacraments, the recipient swears fidelity.

Thus marriage and baptism share the common element of faith. It is not precisely the same kind of faith in the

two sacraments. But these three comparisons between the faith we ask in Baptism and the mutual faith that binds a husband and wife together will help us understand marriage better.

1. Baptism marks our entrance into the Christian way of life. We profess belief in God. But the object of our faith is obscure. We do not *see* God. Neither the highest mystical experience, nor the most penetrating insight of the philosopher nor the sincere faith of believers can lift the veil from God's face. Our knowledge and love of God is measured by the intensity of our belief. In marriage, the spouses swear their faith in each other. In this case the object of our faith is physically present. But there remains an 'unseen' and obscure quality even in this faith. The two persons united in marriage remain two. The deepest love cannot render them totally communicable to each other. In truth, the more they know and love each other, the more they must *believe* in each other, in the other's incommunicable reality, in his hidden richness and individual personality. Faith in God as faith in marriage demands belief of those who would enter either way of life.

2. A second level of comparison is more concrete. For both faiths suffer from the effects of sin. Our faith in God is constantly contradicted by evil. Our intelligences and wills are always the prey of disorientated passions and false idols. Our faith in God is a perpetually menaced faith. Grace can be lost and we can break our baptismal vows. Marriage is a victim of this sin also. Between married couples sin inserts a principle of division that works against the union they strive for. Sin sows the seeds of egoism, doubt and conflict. The same perverse power that makes faith in God difficult, makes marital faith difficult. This is true in such wise that when grace is lost the union between spouses is thereby weakened. Every sin is a sin against love.

3. On a third level of comparison we see that both our faith in God and marriage are exposed to the attacks of a

secular society. St. John warned the faithful to keep themselves from idols. The Church warns married couples that their "fidelity in all things" cannot survive the onslaught of the world without the grace of God. As A. M. Carre says: "With a great number, unconsciously perhaps, a shifting of values, compromise, cowardly actions and a kind of subordination of their ideals to the ready-made judgments of social environment, dissolve the basis of mutual faith."

These comparisons are merely sketches. But they do point up the dangers that beset faith, whether in the believer or in the soul of the married person. The only effective resistance against these dangers is "total cooperation between God and creature . . . "Grace, on the one hand, and the intelligence and will of man, on the other, are convoked to that meeting ground where salvation is worked out."

QUESTIONS

1. What do baptism and marriage have in common?
2. Note some important differences between these two sacraments.
3. Draw up the author's triple parallel between baptism and marriage in your own words. Can you think of some other points of comparison?
4. What are some expressions of individuality in marriage that are a cause of disappointment and discouragement?
5. What are some common doubts married couples experience and how can these be resolved?
6. List some aspects of modern society that weaken fidelity in marriage?
7. What guarantee do we have that a marriage will be a success?

Discuss:

1. The more couples know and love each other the more they must *believe* in the person loved.
2. When one or another of a married couple falls into sin, the strength of love is weakened.
3. The efforts of a whole lifetime are needed to achieve intimate communion in marriage.
4. God's grace and man's intelligence and will are necessary for both a good life and a successful marriage.

Chapter XI. *The Mystery of Marriage*

SYNOPSIS

Marriage is fundamentally a mystery, that is to say, something that participates intimately in the very life of God. It must be lived, therefore, on a mystical plane. It must be motivated by the reality of Christ. It must draw its strength from faith in Him.

The mystery of marriage flows from its sacramental nature. The profound meaning of marriage as a sacrament can be understood by reflecting upon it, first of all, as an act of Christ; and, secondly, as an adaptation to human circumstances. This first line of reflection has been developed in the previous chapter.

The second reflection (upon marriage as an adaptation to human circumstances) leads us to understand that Christ's action is united to the whole scope of human situations. Marriage is the most total, the most sacred and the most intimate of all human situations. Through the sacra-

ment of marriage Christ becomes a part of this state. He assimilates Himself to a situation in which two people consecrate their lives.

The high mystical possibilities of marriage are based upon the fact that Christ thus associates Himself with it. This mystery can best be grasped by seeing it as a participation in the paschal mystery of Christ. Paschal mystery here refers to Christ's resurrection. Through this mystery His humanity passed into the glorified state of eternity. Hence every mystery that participates in the mystery of Christ's glorification takes on something of His glory. It is in this way that human love becomes a mystery. Because Christ has joined Himself to this love through the sacrament of marriage, He lives in it; He transforms it; He gives it new meaning and ennobles it with the glory of His own resurrected life.

This mystical transformation applies to marriage both as a personal state of life and as a social institution.

Considered in its personal aspect, it means, briefly, that couples live their marriages in Christ. Those who have received the sacrament of marriage can say: my love is part of the mystery of Christ; Christ has enveloped my love and my home with His mystery. It is not only an earthly reality, but already something of an eternal one. That is why marriage is an enduring situation. It is a permanent sacrament of love. The sacrament does not only exist at the moment when vows are exchanged. It is perpetually renewing itself. In the countless actions of every day, Christ gives Himself to husbands and wives through the love they have for each other. As long as their love endures, husbands and wives are ministers of their sacrament. They are constantly giving Christ to each other. That is why the chief means of their sanctity is their love.

Coming now to the social dimension, we see the same operation taking place. Marriage is not only a personal state of life; it constitutes a cell in the Mystical Body. The early

Church writers spoke of the "order of the conjoined," indicating that the family had a social role to play beside that of other social orders, such as the clergy. The home is part of the vast, social hierarchy that makes up the Church. This social role of marriage can be further illustrated by considering it under the following headings:

1. *The Home as the Mature Cell of the Church.* Marriage gives couples a special responsibility in the Church. St. Paul went to far as to identify the home as a Church. Thus every wedding adds something new to the Church. It also imposes upon couples the obligation of exercising a veritable "ministry." Husbands and wives must *act* in the Church.

2. *The Home as an Educator in the Faith.* This obligation is carried out first of all by the efforts parents make to create a center of Christian education in their home. The family is the first Church of children. The heritage of our faith is handed down primarily in the home. Failure of homes in this respect accounts at once for the large number of formal Catholics and the de-Christianization of social institutions. Unless children live the Christian life in the home, they very likely won't live it at all.

3. *The Home as a Center of Worship.* Another form of ministry parents must exercise is to make their home a center of Christian worship. This means first of all that the home must be a community of prayer. The father, as head of the family, here exemplifies in a marvelous manner the royal priesthood of the laity.

4. *The Home as a Witness.* This means that the home must develop a missionary spirit. It will inculcate in the children a desire to show forth and announce Christ by the example of their lives. In this sense, the apostolic mission of the Church is a practical consequence of the sacrament of marriage.

The vocation of Christian marriage is a constant challenge. To keep the edge of their love keen and to understand the full implications of their vocation they must, first,

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The vocation of Christian marriage is a constant challenge. To keep the edge of their love keen and to understand the full implications of their vocation they must, first,

believe in their love for each other and strive to perfect it each day. Secondly, they must frequently renew within themselves the sense of mystery that binds them to the mystery of Christ.

These considerations explain the ultimate basis of the unity and indissolubility of marriage. Marriage is one and indissoluble because Christ is one. The lack of faith in this deep reality of marriage accounts for much of the mediocrity and division found in modern homes.

Christian husbands and wives love imperfectly when they love only with a human love. Marriage attains its fullest perfection when Christ becomes a living presence in it.

For then it is lived in a dimension of eternity, in union with the Easter of Christ.

QUESTIONS

1. What is the meaning of mystery?
2. In what sense is marriage a mystery?
3. Do the words "mystical" and "mystery" express the same idea?
4. Distinguish briefly the "personal" and "social" aspects of marriage.
5. What are the two permanent effects of marriage from a "personal" point of view?
6. List three ways in which the home can share in the social mission of the Church.
7. What do we mean when we say that married couples must "act in the Church"?
8. What are two ways in which husbands and wives can live their marriage on a deeper level?
9. How can an "awareness of mystery" be developed by married couples?
10. What is the basis of the indissolubility of marriage?

Discuss:

1. Marriage as an act of Christ.
2. Marriage as an adaptation of Christ to human circumstances.
3. Marriage as a participation in the mystery of Easter.
4. Marriage as a permanent sacrament of love.
5. Marriage as the order of the conjoined.
6. Marriage as the mature cell of the Church.

