

CHRISTIAN PERSONALISM AND THE DEBATE OVER THE NATURE AND ENDS OF MARRIAGE

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“Spousal love involves a total gift of self that, by its very nature, founds a form and is itself a form.”



The distinguishing feature and organic center of the doctrine of the Second Vatican Council is trinitarian Christocentrism. In terms of the council’s teaching on the meaning of Revelation, the nature of sacred liturgy, the mystery of the Church, and above all, the Church’s missionary opening to the world—the figure of Jesus Christ, the only Son of the Father, is presented as the beginning, the middle, and the end.¹ He is at once the fullness of the Godhead and the deepest truth of creation: the one *for whom* all things were made and the one *in whom* all things hold together (cf. Col 1:15–20 and Heb 2:10). This trinitarian Christocentrism is the reason why John

¹Pope Paul VI’s “Opening Address” at the start of the second session on 29 September 1963 exemplifies the Christocentric orientation of the council: “From what point, dear brethren, do we set out? . . . What is the road we intend to follow? What is the goal we propose to ourselves? These three very simple and at the same time very important questions have, as we well know, only one answer, namely that here at this very hour we should proclaim Christ to ourselves and to the world around us; Christ our beginning, Christ our life and guide, Christ our hope and our end. . . . Let no other light be shed on this Council, but Christ the light of the world! Let no other truth be of interest to our minds, but the words of the Lord, our only Master! Let no other aspiration guide us but to be absolutely faithful to him!”

Paul II could describe the Second Vatican Council as “the great grace bestowed on the Church in the twentieth century . . . [and] a sure compass by which to take our bearings in the century now beginning.”²

The significance of Vatican II’s christocentric deepening and enlivening of dogma comes to light against the backdrop of the question of nature and grace, taken in its broadest sense. Without confusing the order of creation and the new gift of deifying grace, the council documents point the way to a rediscovery of an older tradition that conceives Jesus Christ as the deepest truth of both nature and grace. Not only is he “the mediator and fullness of all revelation” (*Dei Verbum*, 2), but by revealing the mystery of the Father’s love Christ brings to light the original truth or *logos* of creation itself.³ Pope Benedict XVI thus sums up the theological vision of the council when he writes:

²John Paul II, *Novo millennio ineunte*, 57.

³In his 1968 “Kommentar zum I. Kapitel” [*Gaudium et spes*, 11–22], in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, v. 5, ed. H. Vorgrimler, et al. (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969), 115–64, Joseph Ratzinger recalls the sharp debates that accompanied the drafting of the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*. Ratzinger notes that a significant number of council Fathers were determined to overcome the neo-scholastic “representation of nature and the supernatural viewed far too much as merely juxtaposed” (119). “As opposed to this,” he writes, “it was urged that the starting-point should be Christ, the second Adam, from whom alone the Christian picture of man can be correctly developed” (120). These remarks help to explain the fundamental importance that Ratzinger and John Paul II accord to the well known words of *Gaudium et spes*, 22: “Christ the new Adam, in the very revelation of the mystery of the Father and His love, fully reveals man to himself and brings to light his high calling.” Commenting on this text, Ratzinger writes: “In accordance with the whole composition of the text, the chapter on the dignity of man culminates in Christ who is now presented as the true answer to the question of being human, and therefore to the questions of true humanism and of atheism. Article 22 thus returns to the starting-point, Article 12, and presents Christ as the eschatological Adam to whom the first Adam already pointed; as the true image of God which transforms man once more into likeness to God. . . . We are probably justified in saying that here for the first time in an official document of the magisterium, a new type of completely Christocentric theology appears. On the basis of Christ this dares to present theology as anthropology and only becomes radically theological by including man in discourse about God by way of Christ, thus manifesting the deepest unity of theology. The generally theologically reserved text of the Pastoral Constitution here attains very lofty heights and points the way to theological reflection in our present situation” (159).

The “name” of the Blessed Trinity is, in a certain sense, imprinted upon all things because all that exists, down to the last particle, is in relation; in this way we catch a glimpse of God as relationship and ultimately, Creator Love. All things derive from love, aspire to love and move impelled by love . . . “In him we live and move and have our being,” St. Paul said at the Areopagus of Athens (Acts 17: 28). The strongest proof that we are made in the image of the Trinity is this: love alone makes us happy because we live in a relationship, and we live to love and to be loved. Borrowing an analogy from biology, we could say that imprinted upon his “genome,” the human being bears a profound mark of the Trinity, of God as Love.⁴

My aim in what follows is to probe and develop this thesis regarding the council’s trinitarian Christocentrism by reflecting on the section of *Gaudium et spes* devoted to marriage and family. This text reflects a development of doctrine that displays the breadth and fruitfulness of the council’s central theological vision. After all, if Christ reveals man to himself as person, he must also reveal to humanity the communion of love that is both the earthly matrix of the identity of the person and its highest natural expression. Yet *Gaudium et spes* does not simply apply trinitarian Christocentrism to the realm of marriage and family; as I will suggest at the conclusion of this essay, the council’s development of Catholic teaching about matrimony also enriches our contemplation of the mystery of Christ in his eucharistic and ecclesial body.

I begin with a citation from Joseph Ratzinger that provides some historical context for *Gaudium et spes*’ treatment of marriage:

In the [nineteen-] thirties and forties, some Catholic moral theologians had begun to criticize the one-sidedness of the orientation of Catholic sexual morality toward procreation from the point of view of personalist philosophy. Above all they called attention to the fact that the classic treatment of marriage in Canon law, based on its ‘ends’, did not do full justice to the essence of marriage. . . . In no way did these theologians deny the importance of fecundity in the complex values of human sexuality. But they assigned a new place to it within the framework of a more personalistic perspective in the way of considering marriage. These discussions were important and have

⁴Pope Benedict XVI, “Angelus for the Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity,” 7 June 2009.

produced a significant deepening of the Catholic doctrine on matrimony. The Council accepted and confirmed the best aspects of these reflections. But at this point in time a new line of development began to materialize. Whereas the reflections of the Council were based on the unity of person and nature in man, personalism began to be understood in opposition to “naturalism” (as if the human person and its needs could enter into conflict with nature). Thus an exaggerated personalism led some theologians to reject the internal order and language of nature (which instead is moral of itself, according to the constant teaching of the Catholic Church), leaving to sexuality and conjugal life the sole point of reference in the will of the person.⁵

The Catholic personalists alluded to in the opening sentence undoubtedly include Dietrich von Hildebrand (1889–1977) and Herbert Doms (1890–1977). The publication of von Hildebrand’s book *Die Ehe* in 1929 and Doms’ *Von Sinn und Zweck der Ehe* in 1935 provoked a heated debate both in Europe and the United States on the nature and ends of marriage.⁶ Von Hildebrand and Doms developed an account of marriage that focused on the fundamental importance of spousal love conceived as a reciprocal “gift of self.”

In a preface to the 1942 English translation of his book *Marriage*, von Hildebrand explains that his aim is to call attention to the “spiritual significance of marriage,” and to elucidate “not only the primary end of procreation, but its primary meaning as the intimate union of two persons in mutual love.”⁷ He writes:

“*Magna res est amor!*”—“A great thing is love!” Although directly referring to the love of God, this saying of Blessed Thomas à Kempis can be applied to all authentic love and especially to conjugal love. An understanding of this is beginning to grow in

⁵Joséph Ratzinger, *The Ratzinger Report* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1985), 88.

⁶Dietrich von Hildebrand, *Die Ehe* (Munich: Verlag Ars Sacra, 1929); Eng., *Marriage: The Mystery of Faithful Love* (Manchester, N.H.: Sophia Institute Press, 1991). H. Doms, *Vom Sinn und Zweck der Ehe* (Breslau: Ostdeutsche Verlagsanstalt, 1935); Eng., *The Meaning of Marriage* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1939). A bibliography of the initial debate sparked by the work of these Catholic personalists can be found in John C. Ford, “Marriage: Its Meaning and Purposes,” *Theological Studies* 3 (1942): 333–74.

⁷von Hildebrand, *Marriage*, xxiv

different countries, and moral theologians are emphasizing the role of love in marriage, a role which was previously underestimated by some. In stressing the primary *end* of marriage—procreation—certain theological treatises have overlooked the primary *meaning* of marriage, which is love.⁸

Acknowledging his indebtedness to von Hildebrand, Herbert Doms sounded a similar note regarding love as the primary meaning of marriage. And Doms was more forthright in his criticism of the traditional teaching that “procreation is the primary end of marriage.” “The conjugal act,” he writes, “is full of meaning and carries its own justification in itself, *independently of its orientation toward offspring.*”⁹

Not surprisingly, this proposed rethinking of the nature of marriage was met with sharp criticism from Catholic moral theologians and eventually the Congregation of the Holy Office, which was concerned with upholding the traditional hierarchy of ends. On 1 April 1944 the Holy Office issued the following clarification:

In recent years a number of books and articles have been published treating of the ends of marriage, of their mutual order and relationship, which deny that the primary end of marriage is the generation of offspring, or that the secondary ends are subordinate to the primary, but are instead independent of it. In these writings the primary end of marriage is designated differently by different authors. Some say it is the mutual fulfillment and personal perfection of the spouses through their total sharing of life and conduct. Others say it is the spouses’ mutual love and union developed and perfected in the psychological and physical giving of themselves to one another. . . . This novel way of thinking and writing is prone to breed error and uncertainty. In view of this the Most Excellent and Reverend Fathers of this Supreme Congregation, charged with the defense of faith and morals, met on Wednesday, March 29, 1944, to consider the following question: “Whether the opinion of some current authors is admissible which either denies that the primary end of marriage is the generation and nurture of offspring, or teaches that the secondary ends are not essentially subordinate to the

⁸von Hildebrand, *Marriage*, xxv–xxvi.

⁹Herbert Doms, “Conception personaliste du mariage d’après S. Thomas,” *Revue Thomiste* 45 (1939): 763 [emphasis added].

primary, but are independent of it and equally primary.” Our response to this in decree: negative.¹⁰

In hindsight it seems fair to say that the time was not yet ripe for an adequate integration of the procreative end of marriage and the personalist understanding of conjugal love.

Instead of delving into the work of the personalists, whose importance and limitations Ratzinger nicely expresses in the above passage, I want to focus on what Ratzinger describes as a “significant deepening of Catholic doctrine” brought by the conciliar text. I turn, then, to the spring of 1962, six months before the opening of the council, when the Theological Commission tasked with preparing for the council submitted a draft schema titled *De castitate, virginitate, matrimonio, familia*.¹¹ The principal author of this schema was the head of the Theological Commission and Prefect of the Holy Office, Cardinal Alfredo Ottaviani. Among the errors that the Theological Commission expected the council to condemn are the following:

[this Holy Synod] condemns the opinion asserting that marriage is a specific means of attaining that perfection by which man is truly and properly an image of God and of the Blessed Trinity. . . . What is more, it condemns the theories which subvert the right order of values by making the primary end of marriage inferior to the biological and personal values of the spouses. . . . So much is procreation primary and overriding (*praevalens*) that it in no way depends on any of the other intended ends . . . nor can it be reduced to equality with.¹²

When this schema was submitted to the Central Preparatory Commission an intense discussion ensued which anticipated the debates that would accompany the drafting of *Gaudium et spes*. Cardinals Döpfner of Munich and Alfrink of Utrecht voiced a common concern: missing from this draft schema on “Chastity,

¹⁰ *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, vol. 36 (1944), 103.

¹¹ *Acta Concilio Oecumenico Vaticano II Apparando*, Series II (*Praeparatio*) vol. 2, Pars 3, 893–937. Theodore Mackin, *What is Marriage?* (New York: Paulist Press, 1982), provides a helpful overview of the ante-conciliar and conciliar debates.

¹² *Acta Concilio Oecumenico Vaticano II Apparando*, Series II (*Praeparatio*), vol. 2, Pars 3, 910; cited in Mackin, 250–51.

Virginity, Marriage, Family” is an adequate reflection on the nature of marital love. “One gets the impression,” Döpfner interjected,

that what it must say of marital love it says in a grudging way, more in order to warn against its dangers than to present it in its authentic nature. For example, in the entire chapter “The Divinely Established Order of Marriage,” nothing more is said about married love than the condemnation, at the end of the chapter, of the opinion of “those who claim that marital love is the primary end in the objective order.”¹³

The response of Ottaviani to this line of criticism is instructive:

As to the question of marital love, about which many and endless things have been said—things that tell of the environment in which Cardinals Döpfner, Alfrink and others live—it seems to me that it must be taken with a grain of salt [*cum mica salis*] . . . Today the aspect of marital love is exaggerated to the point where it is set in the front rank, ahead of the nature itself of the marriage contract and ahead of the primary end. We have included in the constitution a paragraph on the moral necessity for the spouses loving one another. For, rather than being of the nature of marriage, this love is one of its duties.¹⁴

Ottaviani’s concern is that if love is deemed essential to marriage, when love ceases, there is no reason why the marriage itself should not be ended. Ottaviani’s warning that romantic love cannot constitute the nature of marriage is well-taken, but there is an important weakness (or at least a one-sidedness) in his position that will be remedied by *Gaudium et spes* and John Paul II. The weakness consists in a failure both to grasp that love is an objective form, and to appreciate the theological depth of marital consent. There is, then, a logical connection between Ottaviani’s Theological Commission seeking to condemn the idea that Christian marriage specifies the call to holiness and their claim that “so much is procreation primary . . . that it in no way depends on any other intended ends.” Garrigou-Lagrange exhibits this connection when he writes that “holy virginity is immediately ordered to the good of the soul, to the contemplative life and union with God, whereas

¹³*Ibid.*, 947–48; cited in Mackin, 253.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 977–78; cited in Mackin, 256–57.

marriage is ordered to the conservation of the human species and the active life.”¹⁵ Note that we are dealing with a failure to appreciate fully even the natural form of marriage—and that it is precisely this failure that prevents the mystery of Jesus Christ from revealing anything profound about the nature or *logos* of marriage itself, or vice versa.

At this point we can better understand the doctrinal development of *Gaudium et spes* that has been confirmed and deepened in subsequent magisterial teaching. *Gaudium et spes* defines marriage as a community of love, an intimate partnership of life and love ordained to the procreation and education of children. Marital consent is not simply—as the language of the 1917 Code of Canon Law suggested—the granting of a right over one’s body for certain acts but rather “that human act whereby spouses mutually bestow and accept each other” (48). This idea of a sincere gift of self, which was introduced earlier in *Gaudium et spes* in the context of a communion of person’s imaging the Triune God (cf. 24), resounds like a refrain throughout the entire chapter on marriage. It has nothing to do with the reduction of love to a psychological disposition rightly combated by Ottaviani; spousal love involves a total gift of self that, by its very nature, founds a form and is itself a form. The reciprocal gift of self that brings the marriage into being culminates precisely where the gift is as it were taken out of the spouses’ hands and becomes an objective form endowed with the equally objective properties of unity and indissolubility—indissoluble precisely because the gift of self is total and thus irrevocable.

Despite repeated attempts by Ottaviani and others to reintroduce into the schema the language of primary and secondary ends for marriage, the council fathers sedulously avoided this terminology. Significantly, the language of a hierarchy of distinct ends remains conspicuously absent in virtually all subsequent magisterial documents, including *Humane vitae* (1968), the revised *Rite of Marriage* (1969 and 1990), *Familiaris consortio* (1981), the *Code of Canon Law* (1983), and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1992).¹⁶

¹⁵Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *The Love of God and the Cross of Jesus*, vol. 1, trans. Sr. Jeanne Marie (St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co., 1947), 348.

¹⁶One exception to this silence is John Paul II’s General Audience of 10 October 1984: “According to the traditional language, love, as a superior ‘power,’

How should we interpret this deliberate avoidance by the Second Vatican Council and the subsequent Magisterium of the terminology formerly used? Several theologians have suggested that the shift away from the language of a hierarchy of distinct ends represents a fundamental break or reversal in the Church's teaching. For example, the authors of the 1977 study *Human Sexuality: New Directions in American Catholic Thought* claim that "[t]he Council's deliberate rejection of the centuries-long tradition that regarded the procreative end as supreme, necessitates a thorough rewriting of the theology of marital sexuality found in the manuals."¹⁷ Setting aside the strange idea that an Ecumenical Council would deliberately reject a centuries-long tradition, this interpretation ignores or misconstrues the clear teaching of *Gaudium et spes* that "by their very nature, the institution of matrimony itself and conjugal love are ordained for the procreation and education of children, and find in them their ultimate crown" (48). The widespread tendency to place the "personalism" of *Gaudium et spes* in simple opposition to the preceding tradition's emphasis on the procreative end of marriage is premised on a false opposition between person and nature. In a seminal text that anticipates the teaching of *Humanae vitae*, *Gaudium et spes* affirms that

coordinates the acts of the persons. Although, in approaching the issue, neither the conciliar constitution nor the encyclical [*Humanae vitae*] use the language that was at one time customary, they nevertheless speak about that to which the traditional expressions refer. As a higher power that man and woman receive from God together with the particular 'consecration' of the sacrament of Marriage, love involves a right coordination of the ends according to which—in the Church's traditional teaching—the moral (or rather 'theological and moral') order of the life of the spouses is constituted. The teaching of *Gaudium et spes* as well as that of *Humanae vitae* clarifies the same moral order in reference to love, understood as a superior power that gives adequate content and value to conjugal acts according to the truth of the two meanings, the unitive and the procreative, in reverence for their inseparability. In this renewed orientation, the traditional teaching on the ends of marriage (and on their hierarchy) is confirmed and at the same time deepened from the point of view of the interior life of the spouses, of conjugal and familial spirituality" (John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, trans. Michael Waldstein [Boston: Pauline Books, 2006], 643).

¹⁷*Human Sexuality: New Directions in American Catholic Thought, A Study Commissioned by the Catholic Theological Society of America* (New York: Paulist Press, 1977), 107.

when there is question of harmonizing conjugal love with the responsible transmission of life, the moral aspect of any procedure does not depend solely on sincere intentions or on an evaluation of motives, but must be determined by objective standards. These, based on the nature of the human person and his acts, preserve the full sense of mutual self-giving and human procreation in the context of true love. (51)

This teaching regarding the truth of love as a gift of self presupposes the unity of person and nature and thus the “inseparability” of the procreative and unitive meanings of marriage.

The idea of “inseparability” sheds light on why the Church has shifted away from the language of a hierarchy of distinct ends. The traditional teaching that the end of marriage is the procreation and education of children is carried forward and deepened within the context of a personalist understanding of the truth of conjugal love.¹⁸ Love is integral to the meaning of procreation, just as procreation—an openness to the gift of a new human life—is integral to the unitive movement of love.¹⁹ To love is to receive and give the whole of oneself, and at the heart of this gift is the astonishing capacity to participate in, and bear witness to, the generosity of God, the author of life. In the words of John Paul II, “in its most profound reality, love is essentially a gift; and conjugal love . . . does not end with the couple, because it makes them capable of the greatest possible gift, the gift by which they become cooperators with God for giving life to a new human person. Thus the couple,

¹⁸In *Familiaris consortio*, 32, John Paul II unfolds the logic of “inseparability” in light of the truth of love as a total gift of self: “Sexuality, by means of which man and woman give themselves to one another through the acts which are proper and exclusive to spouses, is by no means something purely biological, but concerns the innermost being of the human person as such. It is realized in a truly human way only if it is an integral part of the love by which a man and a woman commit themselves totally to one another until death. The total physical self-giving would be a lie if it were not the sign and fruit of a total personal self-giving, in which the whole person, including the temporal dimension, is present: if the person were to withhold something or reserve the possibility of deciding otherwise in the future, by this very fact he or she would not be giving totally. This totality which is required by conjugal love also corresponds to the demands of responsible fertility.”

¹⁹Procreation is not simply a biological fact. An essential aspect of what parents are called to communicate to their children is the truth that the child is the permanent sign and fruit of the love of the spouses for one another.

while giving themselves to one another, give not just themselves but also the reality of children.”²⁰

This brings me to the third aspect of *Gaudium et spes*’ development of Catholic doctrine: the personalist idea that marriage is constituted through a reciprocal “gift of self” receives its innermost measure from the mystery of Christ’s love. In the words of *Gaudium et spes*, spousal love has its source in divine love and is structured on the model of Christ’s union with the Church (cf. 48). Through the sacrament of matrimony, “[Christ] abides with [the spouses] so that just as he loved the Church and handed himself over on her behalf, the spouses may love each other with perpetual fidelity through mutual self-bestowal” (48). The Christian family which springs from marriage is “a reflection of the loving covenant uniting Christ with the Church, and a participation in that covenant” (48). The chapter concludes with exhortation to follow Christ, who is the principle of life, so that through “their vocation and through their faithful love, married people can become witnesses of the mystery of love which the Lord revealed to the world by his dying and his rising up to life again” (52). Christian spouses are thus “cooperators with the love of God the Creator, and are, so to speak, the interpreters of that love” (50).

Let me summarize the main points covered so far:

First, *Gaudium et spes* presents a new definition of the nature of marriage and marital consent. Marriage is a community of life and love ordered to the procreation and education of children. Marital consent consists in a mutual gift of two persons—a total and irrevocable gift of self.

Second, the older teaching regarding the primary and secondary ends of marriage is carried forward and deepened in terms of the inseparability of the unitive and procreative meanings of marriage. The ground of this inseparability is an anthropology of love. Created in the image of the Triune God, human beings are created through love and called to share in God’s love through a sincere gift of self.

Third, the source and form of this love is Jesus Christ, who, in the words of the Letter to the Ephesians, “loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God” (Eph 5:2). Interpreting the council’s teaching that marriage should be cele-

²⁰John Paul II, *Familiaris consortio*, 11.

brated within the Mass (cf. *Sacrosanctum concilium*, 78), John Paul II describes Christ's eucharistic sacrifice as the "source" and "interior structure" of Christian marriage.²¹

At this point, a twofold question arises. Do our remarks on married love as form-establishing and formal apply also to "natural marriage," that is, to the nature of matrimony as an institution belonging to the order of creation? I would answer in the affirmative. But, given this affirmative answer, in what sense should we understand the christological norming of marriage emphasized by *Gaudium et spes*?

The sacramental grace bestowed by Jesus Christ not only elevates and perfects marriage, it brings to light the original purpose and end of the nature of marriage itself—marriage is the communion of love that comes from God and that is called to bear witness to his love as the origin, the middle, and the end of human love. Jesus Christ, the Bridegroom who loves and gives himself to the Church, "reveals the original truth of marriage, the truth of the 'beginning.'"²² The great nineteenth-century theologian Matthias Scheeben uncovers the profound connection between the nature of marriage and the mystery of Jesus Christ:

In this sacrament the Church clasps to her heart the first of all human relationships, that upon which the existence and propagation of human nature depends Nowhere has the truth more strikingly come to light that the whole of nature down to its deepest roots, shares in the sublime consecration of the God-man, who has taken nature to Himself. Nowhere does the truth

²¹John Paul II writes: "The Eucharist is the very source of Christian marriage. The Eucharistic Sacrifice, in fact, represents Christ's covenant of love with the Church, sealed with His blood on the Cross. In this sacrifice of the New and Eternal Covenant, Christian spouses encounter the source from which their own marriage covenant flows, is interiorly structured and continuously renewed. As a representation of Christ's sacrifice of love for the Church, the Eucharist is a fountain of charity. In the Eucharistic gift of charity the Christian family finds the foundation and soul of its 'communion' and its 'mission': by partaking in the Eucharistic bread, the different members of the Christian family become one body, which reveals and shares in the wider unity of the Church. Their sharing in the Body of Christ that is 'given up' and in His Blood that is 'shed' becomes a never-ending source of missionary and apostolic dynamism for the Christian family" (*Familiaris consortio*, 57).

²²*Familiaris consortio*, 13.

more clearly appear that Christ has been made the cornerstone upon which God has based the preservation of and growth of nature.²³

We would miss the deepest point Scheeben is making in this passage if we failed to see that the natural form of marriage is already saturated with God. Think of procreation: here, nature's highest fruitfulness is simultaneous with its reception of a gift—the child—that comes from above, from the hands of the Creator. Our passage from Scheeben thus modifies our understanding of the sense in which procreation is the end of marriage. The child, in other words, is not simply the goal of sexual love regarded as a purely instrumental process. For, supposing this to be the case, if another purely instrumental process could lead just as easily to the same goal, why should there be anything special about the instrument consisting in the embrace of man and woman in marriage? This is not to deny that the child is the end of marriage; it is rather to affirm that the child's end-character does not consist simply in being the goal of a purely instrumental function, but in his being the fruit that both proceeds from nature as its supreme fecundity and comes down as a surprising divine gift from above that cannot be instrumentalized in any way. This suggests that the real problem with Ottaviani's theology of marriage is not its insistence on the primacy of the procreative end of marriage, but rather its failure to do justice to the truth of procreation and the relevant meaning of "end."

I think we can extrapolate a more general thesis regarding the theology of nature and grace: the weakness within certain versions of modern neo-scholasticism is not, as is sometimes suggested, that these authors claim too much for nature (and the natural law). It is rather the case that the modern theory of "pure nature" says too little about nature's integrity and fruitfulness, insofar as there is an implicit denial that Jesus Christ reveals the original meaning and end of "nature." At the heart of the theory of "pure nature" is the assumption that human nature's ultimate end must be strictly proportionate; that is, attainable by nature's own powers. The astonishing gift of a child opens up a new horizon of gratuity within the created order. Creation itself is a gift, and the capacity of

²³Matthias Scheeben, *The Mysteries of Christianity*, trans. Cyril Vollert (London: B. Herder Book Co., 1946), 610.

nature to desire what can only be received as a gratuitous gift (i.e., the natural desire for supernatural beatitude) is a sign of God's generosity.

In conclusion, the integration of the procreative and unitive meanings of marriage in the light of the form of matrimony as total self-gift, far from implying any romantic capitulation to the separation of sexual union and fruitfulness, actually turns out to be essential to the recovery of an authentic sense of, and respect for, this fruitfulness itself. Fruitfulness is most truly fruitful, as it were, when the conjugal union is not simply a means to it, but already shares in its end-character by the totality of its self-gift. At the same time, this recovery implies a deeper appreciation of the coincidence of natural fruitfulness and divine gift—already at the level of the natural form of marriage as an institution pertaining to the created order. This structure is an innate opening, indeed, ordination, to being lifted up into the Christ-Church relation that manifests its deepest meaning. “Jesus Christ, the Bridegroom,” writes John Paul II, “who loves and gives Himself reveals the original truth of marriage, the truth of the ‘beginning.’” Thanks to this innate openness, we can say that marriage, as such, is a specific call to holiness in the following of Christ.²⁴ But, as noted at the beginning, this deepened understanding of marriage is not just an illustration of the trinitarian Christocentrism of the council; it also enriches it in turn. For, in being assumed into the Christ-Church relation, the experience of the mystery of natural fruitfulness itself becomes a source of light for understanding concretely what it means for Christ to have loved the Church to the point of dying for her on the Cross. In the gift of Eucharist, Christ communicates the innermost form of his life as gratitude and self-offering. In communicating the substance of his life, Christ gives more than himself. He gives us the Holy Spirit, who bears witness to the love between the Father and

²⁴In *Familiaris consortio*, 56, John Paul II describes the sacrament of marriage as “the specific source and original means of sanctification for Christian married couples and families. It takes up again and makes specific the sanctifying grace of Baptism. By virtue of the mystery of the death and Resurrection of Christ, of which the spouses are made part in a new way by marriage, conjugal love is purified and made holy.” For an extended reflection on marriage as a Christian state of life, see David Crawford, *Marriage and the Sequela Christi: A Moral Theological Study of Marriage as a “State of Perfection” in the Light of Henri de Lubac’s Theology of Nature and Grace* (Rome: Lateran University Press, 2004).

the Son that is the true origin and final end of all created being. Through the twofold gift of Eucharist and Spirit, Christ establishes an eternal covenant with creation. The ultimate fruitfulness of his eucharistic sacrifice is the Church, who is at once the body of Christ and the bride who is called to say “yes”; to give herself for the salvation of the world.²⁵ □

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²⁵Paper delivered at the conference, “‘Keeping the World Awake to God’: The Challenge of Vatican II,” at the Pontifical John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family at The Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C., 12–14 January 2012.