

NOTES



COVENANT AND THE UNION OF LOVE IN M. J. SCHEEBEN'S THEOLOGY OF MARRIAGE

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According to Hans Urs von Balthasar, Matthias Joseph Scheeben's vision of theology is built on a single systematic principle, a particular understanding of love as the heart of sanctity.¹ This understanding of love provides the necessary background for grasping Scheeben's contribution to the theology of marriage.² In a passage highlighted by von Balthasar, Scheeben writes:

This deeper concept of sanctity rests on this, that the proper life of the will in its innermost power and full energy does not merely consist in the will's direction and ordination to or *conformity* with the objectively good and beautiful, a conformity that is the result of some sort of recognition of its value (*Wert*) [that is, the value of the good and the beautiful], but in an *affective union and fulfillment* with it (or *transformation* into it) that appears in part as the *root* of the will's ethical and practical recognition of the good and beautiful, or of its striving for the possession and enjoyment of it, but in part also as the *end and perfection* of this

1 See Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Herrlichkeit: Eine theologische Ästhetik*, Vol. 1: *Schau der Gestalt* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1961), 105–106. Eng. trans.: *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, Vol. 1: *Seeing the Form*, trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1998), 111–12.

2 Scheeben's main text on the theology of marriage is *Die Mysterien des Christentums* (Freiburg: Herder, 1865 [1941]), 488–504. Eng. trans.: *The Mysteries of Christianity*, trans. Cyril Vollert (New York: Herder & Herder, 1946), 593–610. Important is also Scheeben's discussion of the creation of man and woman in his *Dogmatik*. See Matthias Josef Scheeben, *Handbuch der katholischen Dogmatik*, [Manual of Roman Catholic Dogmatics, hereafter, *Dogmatik*], 3 vols. (Freiburg: Herder, 1873), 2:157–196 (= book 3, marginal numbers 419–502. Scheeben's *Dogmatik* will be cited by book and marginal number rather than volume and page. A well documented overview of Scheeben's teaching on marriage is presented by a dissertation written under the direction of Josef Fuchs, S.J. See Mariano Valkovic, *L'uomo, la donna e il matrimonio nella teologia di Matthias Josef Scheeben* [Man, Woman, and Marriage in the Theology of Matthias Joseph Scheeben], *Analecta Gregoriana* 152 (Rome: Gregorian University, 1965).

practical recognition and this striving and in general as the *soul* or *forma* of all further activity of the will. In other words, it [that is, this proper life of the will] consists in love, inasmuch as love, by “being well pleased (*Wohlgefallen*)” in the objectively good and beautiful, binds the lover to the good and beautiful, plunges him into it, forms him into it, and thus penetrates and fills him with it, so that it grows together with him, as it were, and, as a principle immanent to him, propels him to act and strive, filling him with a flow of joy and pleasure. This life of the will, however, is completely pure and perfect only if the will does not merely strive to draw the beloved to itself and into itself as something belonging to its *subjective* perfection, but attaches itself to it so that it goes to it, unites itself with it and gives itself to it (*sich ihm hingibt*) and rests in it.³

In a footnote Scheeben adds, “On this, see the glorious [*herrlich*] theory about love in Thomas, *III Sent.*, d. 27, q. 1-2.” In fact, the text just quoted is a brilliantly concise summary of the discussion of love in these two questions of St. Thomas Aquinas’s commentary on the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard. Like Thomas, Scheeben places the concept of “being well pleased” (*Wohlgefallen*; Latin *complacentia*) at the center of his understanding of love.⁴ This concept seems to go back by way of the Vulgate to the Greek εὐδοκία or εὐδόκησα in God the Father’s words spoken at the baptism of Jesus: “You are my beloved Son, in you I am well pleased (εὐδόκησα, *complacui*)” (Mark 1:11).⁵

In the text quoted above, Scheeben unfolds the implications of *complacentia* in three steps that describe the event of love with increasing depth and completeness. In the first step, love binds the lover to the good and beautiful; it plunges him into it; it forms, penetrates and fills the lover with it. Scheeben then turns the dynamic around: the good and beautiful itself becomes active. It grows together with the lover; it becomes an inner principle for him by which he acts and strives; and it is for him the source of joy and pleasure. A third step completes the analysis: genuine love avoids a false ordering of the good and beautiful to the lover. The lover goes out of himself to the beloved, unites himself to it and gives himself to it in such a way as to rest in it. It is noteworthy that a notion quite close to “the gift

3 Scheeben, *Dogmatik*, 2:657. The double emphasis on “soul” is Scheeben’s.

4 On “*complacentia*” in St. Thomas, see the very illuminating article: Frederick E. Crowe, “Complacency and Concern in the Thought of St. Thomas,” *Theological Studies* 20 (March 1959): 1–39; 20 (June 1959): 198–230; 20 (September 1959): 343–395. Crowe does not examine the origin of the word “*complacentia*.”

5 Words composed of the two roots “*com*” and “*placeo*” are very rare in classical Latin. “*Complacentia*” as a noun is not found in classical Latin at all, nor in the Latin fathers. It seems to have entered philosophical and theological discourse in the Middle Ages.

of self" in St. John of the Cross and Karol Wojtyła stands near the conclusion of Scheeben's unfolding dynamism of love.⁶

In close connection with his understanding of sanctity as the perfection of love, Scheeben develops an account of the procession of the Holy Spirit as the union of love within the Trinity.

Divine love should be viewed from three perspectives.

(1) Love presents itself to us above all as God's "*good pleasure*" (*Wohlgefallen*) in himself as the highest goodness and beauty, i.e., inasmuch as his will is perfectly united to this good and beauty and filled by it. Here the product of love does not yet appear as the pledge or gift, but simply as *the aspiration or sigh of love*, in which love breathes forth its glow and energy, or as the seal set on the heart. "Set me as a seal on your heart" (Song of Sol. 8:6). It is in this way that the Greek fathers describe the Holy Spirit when they speak of him as *the fragrance of God's holiness*, in analogy with incense and the fragrance of plants.

(2) God's love presents itself to us also as the *mutual love* (*amor mutuus*) of the Father and the Son for each other, which is founded precisely on their communion (*Gemeinschaft*) in the possession of absolute goodness and beauty. From this angle, the manifestation of love, i.e., the exercise and conclusion of their mutual communion, appears again in an aspiration, but at the same time in a bond that emerges from it (*vinculum, nexus*) which, inasmuch as it is a bond of love, is called *pledge* (*pignus, arrha*, because in a pledge the lover possesses the beloved or offers himself to the beloved for possession) and kiss (*osculum*, in Augustine also *amplexus*, embrace).

(3) By loving himself as the infinite good, God loves himself also as the most communicable and communicative good. As a consequence, his love for himself contains the readiness for the

6 See the discussion of "gift of self" in the introduction to John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body* (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 2006) translation and introduction by Michael Waldstein, 23-34. Scheeben often uses impersonal language. He tends to speak about the will rather than the person willing; about the good and beautiful rather than the good and beautiful beloved person. Yet the reason for such language is not a preference for the impersonal over the personal. The reason is a "formal" way of speaking in which words are used according to the precise aspect or "form" under discussion. It is clear to Scheeben that the will is the will of a person and that the good and beautiful is above all a person.

communication of his goodness and thus a supreme liberality (*Freigebigkeit, liberalitas*). In this direction it is active in the form of giving (*Hingabe*); and the *outpouring* or *fruit* of its liberality, in which and by which giving (*Hingabe*) is realized, is called gift (*Gabe*). . . .

Since the outpouring of divine love is infinitely filled with pleasure and bliss, it appears in all of these terms also as the stream of the pleasure and sweetness of God. In all three perspectives, not only in the first, the outpouring is illustrated by *flame* that shoots up from the fire, and even more so by *breath* that comes from the heart, from the furnace of the glow of love, since in a kiss, breath also expresses unification with the beloved and giving (*Hingabe*) to the beloved.⁷

Again the Father's words of love in the baptism of Jesus stand at the heart of the argument—"in you I am well pleased, *in te complacui*." And again Scheeben unfolds the dynamism of love from this point in three steps with increasing completeness: the aspiration of love and its fragrance; the bond, pledge, kiss and embrace of mutual love; and the giving (*Hingabe*) and gift (*Gabe*) of love. The point of arrival of the unfolding of love is once again close to St. John of the Cross' and John Paul II's "gift of self."

In the procession of the Holy Spirit as love, one sees love in its unsurpassable fullness at the very origin. What Scheeben says about the love in which sanctity consists is ultimately intelligible only in this light. The same point holds for what he says about marriage. Scheeben's account of marriage flows directly from his understanding of sanctity as love and its root in the Holy Spirit of love.

Marriage Between Nature and Grace

Scheeben draws a very sharp distinction between nature and the supernatural. He does so in opposition to a tendency toward confusion of these realms in German romantic theology immediately before him. The distinction is very prominent in his discussion of marriage. This clear boundary between nature and grace serves him to emphasize all the more the union between them. Throughout Scheeben's works the central image of this union is that of a great marriage.

If we survey his work as a whole we have to be thankful for the initial clarity of his conceptual distinctions [between the natural and the supernatural] which later allows him to proceed without the least danger to treat of the very profound interpenetration

⁷ Scheeben, *Dogmatik*, 2:951.

of both realms, a task on which he had already embarked at the conclusion of his book *Nature and Grace* and which from that point on becomes increasingly important. As soon as Scheeben passes from formal considerations to the content of the mysteries, we see that the creature's "elevation" into God occurs as a result of a prior descent and ingress on God's part, an interpenetration to which, from the very beginning, Scheeben gives the name of "marriage." As he proceeds he introduces and develops the concept [of marriage] in every aspect of dogmatic theology. His theology thus becomes one great doctrine of *eros*, to an extent that far surpasses anything attained in this respect by past theology.⁸

Yet, if Scheeben's keen sensitivity to *eros* and the systematic power with which he deploys *eros* as a theological principle in his overall vision leads one to expect that his chapter on marriage would begin on a personalist note of loving union and mutual self-gift, one will be disappointed. What first and foremost meets the eye is—children. However, it quickly becomes evident that Scheeben by no means ignores the mutual love between husband and wife. He always places procreation in the foreground as the end that accounts for the specific difference in the definition of marriage as a particular kind of human community and communion, but on this basis he gives much room to the union of love between man and woman.

The Natural End of Marriage

Scheeben begins his account of marriage on the natural level with a definition of marriage in terms of its end.

Regarded from the purely natural standpoint, apart from all positive divine ordination, marriage is nothing but the habitual bond of man and woman suited to the purpose (*zweckmäßig*) of the propagation of the human race. The character and requirements of this end are all that determine the essence of the bond. The sublimity of this end raises the marriage contract (*Vertrag*) above all other contracts. The demands of this end take away from the contracting parties the power to lay down the conditions of their bond according to their own arbitrary discretion. Once they desire the end, they must enter into such relationship with each other as is necessary for the realization of the end.⁹

8 Balthasar, *Herrlichkeit*, 1:102-3; *Glory of the Lord*, 1:109, translation altered.

9 Scheeben, *Mysterien*, 489-90; *Mysteries*, 594. The translation is altered here and in subsequent quotes of the *Mysteries*.

Scheeben never leaves behind this definition of marriage as “the bond of man and woman suited to the purpose of the propagation of the human race.” He says again: “The good that is disposed of in the [marriage] contract [is] the body as a principle of generation.”¹⁰ In a passage that reflects a close study of Immanuel Kant’s understanding of marriage, Scheeben underlines the moral and legal character of this bond, which is a consequence of the dignity of man and woman as images of God.

Since *the spouses themselves are images of God* and as such possess freedom and dignity and especially a true right of ownership over the members of their own bodies as organs that stand at the disposal of the spirit, they *are able* to acquire a right of disposal over the body of the other with the result [1] that ethically and legally that body belongs to them as their own organ, just as by nature the body of each belongs to him- or herself and [2] that accordingly both bodies, their own and that of the other, belong to one spirit as if they were members of one and the same body and thus constitute one body in idea and in spirit. Such a mutual gift and appropriation (*Übergabe und Aneignung*) *must*, moreover, take place, because as an ethical being man may only use what is his own or the use of which is granted to him, and in our case especially, because only a permanent appropriation is suitable to the nature of the end [i.e., the procreation and education of children].¹¹

Scheeben has much to say about the union of love between husband and wife and about the manner in which grace shapes their bond in profoundly new ways and transforms its very essence. But the specific definition of marriage in terms of a mutual gift of the right to “the body as a principle of generation” in the conjugal act remains in place throughout. Indeed, in order to correctly understand the development of Catholic marriage theology, one should note that Scheeben’s 1865 definition of marriage is very close to the definition of marriage in the Church’s 1917 Code of Canon Law.¹²

¹⁰ Scheeben, *Mysterien*, 491; *Mysteries*, 596.

¹¹ Scheeben, *Dogmatik*, 3:434.

¹² See Edward N. Peters, *The 1917 or Pio-Benedictine Code of Canon Law: In English Translation with Extensive Scholarly Apparatus*. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2001). Mackin portrays the 1917 Code as an attempt by canonists without sufficient foundation in marriage theology to create a legal definition suitable for exercising judicial control over marriages. See Theodore Mackin, *What is Marriage?* (New York: Paulist, 1982), 192–222; 229–31. The evidence presented from the works of Scheeben shows that a definition very much along the lines of the 1917 Code was proposed by a notable theologian half a century before the Code, embedded in a full personalist account of love.

Can. 1081. § 2. Marital consent is an act of the will by which each party gives and accepts a perpetual and exclusive right over the body for acts which are of themselves suitable for the generation of children.

Can. 1082. § 1. In order that marital consent be possible it is necessary that the contracting parties be at least not ignorant that marriage is a permanent society between a man and a woman for the procreation of children.

As can be seen, Scheeben's definition ("the bond suited to the propagation of the human race" in which the good given and received is "the body as a principle of generation") clearly anticipates the canonical definition of marriage as "the permanent society between a man and a woman for the procreation of children," in which the good given and received is "the right over the body for acts suitable for the generation of children."

Already on the level of nature, Scheeben holds, the marriage bond has a religious character—because children are images of God called to glorify God. God's positive law confirms this natural religious character by actively intervening so that marriage becomes "what God has joined" (Matt. 19:6). Scheeben understands this act of joining as part of God's positive law, not as part of the order of natural law. It transforms the bond between man and woman in a manner that touches the very essence of the bond.

This [divine intervention of joining man and woman] gave an essentially different form (*gestaltet*) to the meaning of the marriage contract and of the marriage bond itself. *The good that is disposed of in the contract*, the body as a principle of generation, was reserved to God himself as an instrument belonging to him, as "a sacred thing, *res sacra*" which the contracting parties could dispose of only in the name of God. If they then proceeded to dispose of this good in the name of God and surrendered it to each other (*sich gegenseitig hingaben*), they could also take possession of it only in God's name. In both respects they could act only in virtue of the divine authority, and so henceforth it was not so much they themselves who directly joined each other, as God who joined them together through the intermediacy of their consent.¹³

Scheeben's focus in this text is the new "meaning (*Bedeutung*)" of the bond due to God's intervention in "joining" man and woman.¹⁴ What determines the

¹³ Scheeben, *Mysterien*, 491; *Mysteries*, 596.

¹⁴ Scheeben does not seem to use the term "meaning" systematically as other writers on the nuptial

meaning of the bond (above all its indissolubility) is not only the end, children, as an end intended by the practical reason of husband and wife and pursued by them through a marriage contract. Their bond is not merely a contract drawn up by them on this basis on their own authority. God himself “joins” man and woman more intimately and gives a different kind of firmness to their bond by attaching it to himself. The defining end of the bond remains the same, children, but the meaning of the bond is *essentially* deepened. Man and woman act in the name, and as the instruments, of God. Although this deepening goes beyond the natural law, Scheeben adds, it corresponds to the natural dignity of man (*Würde des Menschen*) inasmuch as he has by his very nature a direct relation with God. An understanding of marriage as a mere secular matter would not do justice to this natural dignity. Scheeben proposes the same teaching in more developed form in his *Dogmatik*.

Just as in the act of procreation the spouses act only in special service to the creator and as his special instruments—which implies not merely that the body of one spouse acts as an instrument of the spirit of the other and conversely, but also that both bodies together in their physical union are one organ of the Spirit of God—so also the body of each, when it is given and appropriated in ethical-legal form, must be treated *as a special property and right reserved to God*, and as a consequence the transfer must be accomplished in such a way that the spouses *dispose of their bodies in the name and authority of God*, in order to unite as one organ consecrated to his service, or rather, to be so united by his will.¹⁵

The Supernatural Dimension of the Marital Covenant

Scheeben begins his discussion of marriage on the supernatural level by raising the question, What is a Christian?

What is a Christian? In baptism he is received into the mystical body of the God-man . . . and he belongs to that body both in body and in soul. When he contracts marriage with a baptized person, not merely two human beings . . . but two consecrated members of Christ’s body enter into union to consecrate themselves to the extension of this body. Wherever their bond is in accord with justice, it can have no other *intrinsic* end than to

bond, such as Vladimir Solovyov, Dietrich von Hildebrand, Herbert Doms, Pope Paul VI (in *Humanae Vitae*) and Pope John Paul II do, but sporadically as the occasion arises.

15 Scheeben, *Dogmatik*, 3:435.

beget the expected children for Christ, to whom the married couple themselves belong. . . . Accordingly, in the contracting of marriage itself the contracting parties can only act in the name of the divine head to whom they themselves belong, and for whom they function as his members. In particular, they can dispose of their bodies as generative principles only with the approval of Christ and according to the mind of Christ, for their bodies are no longer their own flesh, but the flesh of Christ. They can unite with each other only on the basis of their oneness with Christ; the union of each to the divine head is carried over into the bond they contract with each other so as to transfigure and consolidate the bond.¹⁶

In this text, the original definition of marriage still holds. Procreation still accounts for the specific essence of the marriage bond, but the bond is transfigured. It is far from being the mere product of a human contract on the couple's own authority for a specific purpose they intend to pursue. It is, rather, an organ through which Christ himself on his own initiative pursues the end of increasing his body by giving life to new persons who are ordered to becoming that body's members.

In order to describe the effective presence of Christ's initiative, Scheeben turns to the general definition of "sacrament" as a sign that effectively communicates the grace it signifies. It would be insufficient, he argues, to see marriage as a natural institution defined by a natural end which acts merely in the cognitive order as a sign for the supernatural union between Christ and the Church. In this way of viewing it, marriage itself would not be a supernatural mystery. It would be the empty natural image of a supernatural mystery that lies outside it. In fact, however, marriage is a sacrament in the full sense and has a more real, essential, and interior relation to the mystery of the union of love between Christ and the Church. It is an image shaped and employed by Christ himself to be an effective cause of a similar union between husband and wife. By the power of his cross, Christ communicates the Holy Spirit as the bond of loving union between himself and the Church. Through the sacrament of marriage he effectively communicates the same gift of loving union to the union of husband and wife in order to transfigure that union after the pattern of his own spousal union with the Church.¹⁷

Scheeben strongly emphasizes the primacy of the common good of the body of Christ in the disposition of this grace of loving union. The common good of extending the body as a whole (as a true common good it is truly the "personal" good of all persons in that whole) has an absolute primacy over the individual or personal intentions and dispositions of the couple.

16 See Scheeben, *Mysterien*, 494–5; *Mysteries*, 599–600.

17 See Scheeben, *Mysterien*, 495–6; *Mysteries*, 600–2.

When they bind themselves to each other they can do so in justice only for the same purpose which Christ pursues in his bond with the Church, namely, to extend the mystical body. They can only act in the Spirit of the union of Christ and the Church and by the same token they can only act in the name of Christ and the Church, because their bodies belong to Christ and his Church, and consequently the right of disposing of them pertains in the first instance not to the earthly couple, but to the heavenly marriage (*connubium*). Therefore their union presupposes the union of Christ with his Church, and carries it further to cooperate with it for a *single* supernatural purpose [i.e., the extension of his body by the addition of new members]. They must cooperate precisely as members of the body of Christ in his Church, and hence as organs of the whole, and therefore they must unite with each other as organs of Christ's body, as organs of the whole that was brought into being by the union of Christ with the Church. Thus their union, their covenant (*Bund*), becomes *an organic member in the great and richly articulated covenant between Christ and His Church, a member which is encompassed, pervaded, and sustained by this mystical covenant*, which participates in the lofty, supernatural, and sacred character of the whole and in its innermost essence represents and reflects that whole.¹⁸

It is noteworthy that in this text Scheeben understands the marriage bond as a "covenant" (*Bund*). In this, he anticipates the teaching of the Second Vatican Council that marriage is a "covenant of love (*foedus dilectionis*)."¹⁹ He does not deny that this bond also has the intrinsic character of a contract of a moral and legal nature, but covenant is the conclusive theological category under which all aspects, including contract, must be subsumed. Marriage is a covenant that receives its inner power from the Spirit of love that animates the encompassing covenant between Christ and his Church.

With great emphasis Scheeben uses the word "organ(ic)" four times in the text just quoted to insist that the covenant between man and woman must be understood as a part of a great whole, the mystical body, as pervaded by the power of that whole, and as serving a common good of that whole. This purpose is not an

¹⁸ Scheeben, *Mysterien*, 496–7; *Mysteries*, 602–3.

¹⁹ See Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (December 7, 1965), 48, in *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Walter M. Abbott (Piscataway, NJ: New Century, 1966). A historical and systematic sketch of the connection between marriage and covenant is offered by Paul F. Palmer, "Christian Marriage: Contract or Covenant?," *Theological Studies* 33 (1972). Palmer shows that the category of covenant was always present in the Church's *lex orandi* in the marriage rite, even if not always in accounts of marriage from the point of view of canon law.

alien good for man and woman, but their own personal good without ceasing to be the good of the whole body, that is, of every person in that body.

The Spirit of Loving Union

The strong insistence on procreation as a common good of the whole body of Christ does not compete against Scheeben's appreciation of the loving union between husband and wife, as indicated already by his use of the category "covenant." He insists strongly on the loving union found in this covenant. Loving union is the main grace of the sacrament.²⁰ In their union and through it as a sacramental sign, husband and wife come to share in the Spirit of union that animates the spousal union of the whole body with Christ.

In an earlier chapter of his *Mysteries* Scheeben unfolds the effects of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit as the bond of loving union between Christ and the Church. Particularly pertinent are some of his observations on the traditional image of the Holy Spirit as the "kiss" between the bridegroom Christ and his bride.

[The Holy Spirit] is the *osculum*, or kiss, of the Son by which the soul becomes his bride. As bride of the Son the soul in grace prays to him, "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth" (Song of Songs 1,1), so that by this spiritual kiss she may become one with him in one Spirit. She becomes one with him as *one* Spirit in the Holy Spirit, whom he breathes forth into her and with whom she melts into one through the breath of love aroused by that Spirit, like a flame which is enkindled from another flame and by meeting and crossing with it unites with it to form *one* flame. The real indwelling of the Spirit of the bridegroom in his bride is to the spiritual marriage of the Son of God with the soul what corporal union is in corporal marriage, a union to which bride and bridegroom aspire (*erstrebt*) in their reciprocal love. Hence it can be regarded as the consummation and sealing of the affective union between the Son of God and the soul.²¹

In this text Scheeben uses an experience better known to us—namely, the sexual intercourse of husband and wife—as a basis for understanding the mysterious union of love between the bridegroom Christ with his bride. Husband and wife "aspire to (*erstreben*)" sexual union as "the consummation and fulfillment of the affective union between" them. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit can be understood by analogy as "the consummation and sealing of the affective union between Christ and his bride."

20 See Scheeben, *Mysterien*, 498; *Mysteries*, 604–5.

21 Scheeben, *Mysterien*, 146; *Mysteries*, 171.

Following the logic of the sacrament as an effective sign of grace, one can turn this relationship around. If the sexual union is illustrative of the spiritual union, the latter in turn illumines and actually informs the former. Given Scheeben's account of marriage as a sacrament, what can be said in light of his thought about a truly Spirit-filled conjugal act of husband and wife? What is the character, in Scheeben's words, of the "union to which bride and bridegroom aspire (*erstrebt*) in their reciprocal love"? Scheeben himself does not explicitly raise and answer this question, but an implicit answer can be drawn from what he does say explicitly.

There is no dissonance or competition between the end of the conjugal act, procreation, and the power of the conjugal act as "the consummation and sealing of affective union" between husband and wife, according to Scheeben. Aware that they do not belong to themselves, but first of all to the bridegroom Christ, and that they do not serve their limited personal or private good, but a great common good that is truly their own (precisely because it is common), husband and wife experience this union as an effect and as an extension into them of the abundance of life in the great covenant and its heavenly marriage.

To unfold this basic point, one can retrace the three steps in Scheeben's analysis of love and the procession of the Holy Spirit.

First, the sanctity of husband and wife in their role as spouses consists, as does all sanctity, in the perfection of love. In loving each other, man and woman find "good pleasure" (*complacentia*) in each other. This first affection binds them to each other and plunges them into each other. It forms them, penetrates and fills them with each other. Conversely, the good and beauty which each embodies actively grows together with its lover. The beloved becomes an inner principle in the lover's heart by which the lover acts and strives. The goodness and beauty of each has the power of "filling [each other] with a flow of joy and pleasure." Yet each is not preoccupied with himself or herself. Both go out to the other, unite and give themselves to the other so as to rest, not in themselves, but in the other.

Following Scheeben's account of the procession of the Holy Spirit as love, one can trace the same three-step unfolding of love in the source of human love, the Spirit of loving union. This holiness or perfection of love in husband and wife expressed in the conjugal act is due to the presence of the Holy Spirit—to the communication of the Holy Spirit's own attributes in his procession from the Father and the Son. When they find "good pleasure" in each other, husband and wife are present to each other by the power of the Spirit in the aspiration or sigh of love by which love breathes forth its glow and energy, as the fragrance of incense is present in the fire of the censer.

The power of the Holy Spirit binds them one to the other. By pledges that take the form of kiss and embrace, they offer and give themselves to each other to be possessed by each other. Aware that they are a source of happiness for each other, they communicate themselves in the form of giving and gift. In all three of

these ways, the gift of the Holy Spirit can be understood as “*breath* that comes from the heart, from the furnace of the glow of love. . . . [I]n a kiss, breath also expresses unification with the beloved and giving (*Hingabe*) to the beloved.”

The terms used in this account of a truly Spirit-filled conjugal act of the spouses are strictly the terms used by Scheeben. The striking similarity of this language with the later language of John Paul II is not the result of projecting the latter's account of love and sexuality into Scheeben. It is fully present in Scheeben though Scheeben does not unfold in detail how it applies to spousal love and the conjugal act.

Scheeben and the Development of Catholic Doctrine

Balthasar calls Scheeben “the greatest German theologian to-date since the time of Romanticism,”²² apparently including himself with some humility in that comparison.

Scheeben shows what resources were at the disposal of Catholic marriage theology a century before Pope Paul VI's encyclical on marriage, *Humanae Vitae*. Scheeben is keenly aware of the meaning of erotic gestures as expressions of personal love, culminating in the gift of self. An example is his penetrating observation, quoted above: “in a kiss, breath also expresses unification with the beloved and giving (*Hingabe*) to the beloved.”²³ In this comment on kissing, Scheeben glosses the first verse of the Song of Songs, “Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth.”

This reference to the Song of Songs highlights an important fact: the main place in which one can find the tradition's understanding of love in marriage is, not the tractates on marriage (designed to prepare those who have to administer canon law in this complex area of the Church's life), but the sphere of influence of the Song of Songs.²⁴ It is clearly inaccurate to say, as some historians do, that until the personalist revolution of the early twentieth century, Catholic theology was imprisoned by a legalistic, biologicistic, and naturalistic reduction of the meaning of the conjugal act and of marriage to reproduction.

Scheeben is obviously aware of what is called today the “unitive” and the “procreative” meaning of the conjugal act. Neither of these two meanings, as he sees them, competes against the other. On the contrary, the covenantal union of love between the spouses depends in its specific nature on the end of procreation. Sexual union in particular is unitive precisely as a procreative union in which husband and wife serve the common good of the body of Christ.

22 Balthasar, *Herrlichkeit*, 1:98; *Glory of the Lord*, 1:104.

23 Scheeben, *Dogmatik*, 2:951.

24 On the influence and importance of this biblical text, see Pope John Paul II, “The Song of Songs,” in *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, trans. and introd. by Michael Waldstein (Boston: Pauline, 2006), 548–593.

The unity of these two meanings in Scheeben can be seen in the manner in which he combines two apparently divergent accounts: the definition of marriage as a contract involving moral and legal obligations in which “the good that is disposed of . . . [is] the body as a principle of generation”; and a more comprehensive vision of the same marriage as a covenant that shares in the covenant of love between God and humanity in the union of the Holy Spirit.

It would not even be sufficient to concede this evidence and simply move the date of the personalist revolution from the 1920s back by about a half century to when Scheeben was writing. Throughout his account, Scheeben is drawing on the resources of the Catholic tradition, particularly on the fathers of the Church, and on St. Bernard and St. Thomas. St. John of the Cross does not play as dominant a role in Scheeben’s thought as he does in that of the young Wojtyła. Nevertheless, that there is a deep convergence with John of the Cross is evident in the great importance Scheeben attaches to the category “gift” (*Hingabe*).

Scheeben is in many respects indebted to personalistic ideas and formulations developed by the German idealists, particularly G. W. F. Hegel (1770–1831) and Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762–1814).²⁵ To these one can add Kant (1724–1804), whom Scheeben seems to have studied increasingly between his *Mysteries* and his *Dogmatik*. Nevertheless, a recent dissertation written under Jesuit moral theologian Josef Fuchs concludes, “it is legitimate to say that his teaching on marriage is faithful to the great patristic and scholastic tradition.”²⁶ Again, one can find the tradition’s understanding of the unitive aspect of love and marriage, above all, in the sphere of influence of the Song of Songs.

25 See Valkovic, *L'uomo, la donna e il matrimonio nella teologia di Matthias Josef Scheeben*, 117–22.

26 Valkovic, *L'uomo, la donna e il matrimonio nella teologia di Matthias Josef Scheeben*, 123.