

Reflections on Marriage and the Family¹

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THE APOSTOLIC LETTER *Novo Millennio Ineunte* published at the end of the great Jubilee year (January 6, 2001) touches on the problems of marriage and family several times either directly or indirectly. After noting the most significant passages, we will offer some reflections on the current situation.

A Widespread and Radical Crisis of the Family

In the first part, John Paul II recalls the different groups of pilgrims who had come to Rome. The first was that of children. These, “with their irrepressible sense of celebration,” turned up again later at the Jubilee of Families, where they were identified “as the springtime of the family and society” (no.10). At this Jubilee, families originating from diverse regions of the world “came to draw fresh enthusiasm from the light that Christ sheds on God’s original plan in their regard (cf. Mk 10:6–8)” (no.10) and undertook to manifest it to “a culture which, in an ever more disturbing way, is in danger of losing sight of the very meaning of marriage and the family as an institution” (no. 10).

What is briefly diagnosed here is the growing divorce between the dominant culture and God’s original plan. The risk is of a

¹ Translation by Robert Williams of “Réflexions sur le mariage et la famille,” *Nova et Vetera* 76 (2001): 9–22.

radical nature since it concerns meaning itself. The Church expects a clear witness from the family.

The fourth part is entitled “Witnesses of Love,” in which we again find the theme of the family. The Church is the home and the school of communion (no. 43–45): “[T]he spirituality of communion, by prompting a trust and openness wholly in accord with the dignity and responsibility of every member of the People of God, supplies institutional reality with a soul” (no. 45).

The variety of vocations in the Church must be understood from this perspective, since “the Christian community’s ability to make room for all the gifts of the Spirit” (no. 46) is tied to communion. This does not mean uniformity, but instead “an organic blending of legitimate diversities” (no. 46). It is therefore necessary that the Church stimulate all the baptized and confirmed to become aware of their active responsibility in ecclesial life. Following the Council, emphasis is laid upon the proper vocation of the laity.²

Number 47 focuses on the pastoral care of the family: “At a time in history like the present, special attention must also be given to *the pastoral care of the family*, particularly when this fundamental institution is experiencing a radical and widespread crisis.”

In a few lines we are reminded of the Christian view of marriage by a double reference to its *origin* and *history*: “[T]he relationship between a man and a woman—a mutual and total bond, unique and indissoluble—is part of God’s original plan, obscured throughout history by our ‘hardness of heart,’ but which Christ came to restore to its pristine splendor, disclosing what had been God’s will ‘from the beginning’ (Mt 19:8). Raised to the dignity of a sacrament, marriage expresses the ‘great mystery’ of Christ’s nuptial love for His Church (cf. Eph 5:32)” (no. 47).

We can understand that, on this point, the Church cannot yield to the pressures of a certain culture even if this latter is widespread and at times militant. The path to be taken should instead be one of witness: “[I]t is necessary to ensure that through an ever more complete Gospel formation, Christian families show convincingly that it is possible to live marriage fully in keeping with God’s plan

² Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, no. 31, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, no. 2.

and with the true good of the human person: of the spouses, and above all of the children who are more fragile. Families themselves must become increasingly conscious of the care due to children, and play an active role in the Church and in society in safeguarding their rights” (no. 47).

In a compact synthesis this text contains the principal elements of the current question. It begins with an observation: the situation is that of a widespread and radical crisis. Next it reminds us of the essential characteristics of Christian marriage: the relationship is reciprocal, total, unique, and indissoluble. This expresses the original plan of God, the plan that holds for all. Following Scripture, it links the difficulties to “a hardness of heart” (no. 47). Finally, it affirms the sacramental nature of Christian marriage as an expression of the spousal love of Christ for the Church. The Pope is not unaware of the fact that this conception of marriage, which is certainly demanding but which alone is liberating and in line with the dignity of persons, is strongly gainsaid by the surrounding culture. Yet, since this conception of marriage and family comes from God, the Church knows that she does not have the right to yield to pressures.

To this challenge the Church offers a twofold response, each one positive: a deeper evangelical education; and the convincing example that this path is possible, that it is not beyond human strength. This alone allows us to meet the demands of the human person. Whether it is a question of the persons of the spouses or of the children, families must undertake the defense of their rights.

The Holy Father has given an authoritative commentary on paragraphs 10 and 47 in his *Address to the Roman Rota* (February 1, 2001).³

Major Challenges

Our age presents a series of challenges that the Christian conscience must meet (cf. no. 51). Indeed, we cannot hold ourselves aloof from the prospects of an *ecological disaster* that renders broad areas of the planet inhospitable and hostile to man. Neither can we shy away when confronted by the problems of a fragile peace, “threatened by

³ John Paul II, “The Natural Dimension of Marriage: Address to the Roman Rota,” *Origins* 30 (Feb. 22, 2001): 581–3.

the specter of catastrophic wars” (no. 51)? How do we remain passive in the face of the “*contempt for the fundamental human rights* of so many people, especially children” (no. 51)?

Here we have so many urgent matters to which the Christian spirit cannot remain indifferent. Certain urgent matters call for a “special commitment” that brings into play “certain aspects of the Gospel’s radical message” (no. 51). These aspects are often the least understood, “to the point of making the Church’s presence unpopular” (no. 51). We cannot shirk such a commitment. John Paul II writes: “I am speaking here of the duty to be committed to *respect for the life of every human being*, from conception to natural death” (no. 51).

From this first imperative one cannot separate the following: “Likewise, the service of humanity leads us to insist, in season and out of season, that those using *the latest advances of science*, especially in the field of biotechnology, must never disregard fundamental ethical requirements by invoking a questionable solidarity which eventually leads to discriminating between one life and another and ignoring the dignity which belongs to every human being” (no. 51).

To cry out means to proclaim with force and firmness. It does not mean to scream, to hurl thoughtless anathemas, or to give free rein to the language of passion. That is why what follows is of prime importance: “For Christian witness to be effective, especially in these delicate and controversial situations, it is important that special efforts be made to explain properly the reasons for the Church’s position, stressing that it is not a case of imposing on non-believers a vision based on faith, but of interpreting and defending the values rooted in the very nature of the human person” (no. 51).

He makes clear that this attitude is dictated by charity. “In this way charity will necessarily become service to culture, politics, the economy, and the family, so that the fundamental principles upon which depend the destiny of human beings and the future of civilization will be everywhere respected” (no. 51).

A commitment demanded by Gospel radicalism requires the courage to face unpopularity and lack of understanding. But this in no way means that one should take part in the misunderstandings. A great effort of explanation is needed in the name of charity, which in this case is intellectual charity. This demands

competence and rigorous thought which tries to grasp the problems at their root.

Finally, what is at stake is the defense of man. The Pope appeals to human reason. Confessional language, or appeals to the faith, would only add to the confusion.

The following paragraph (no. 52) offers several complements. It is laypeople especially, with their “lay vocation,” who can meet these tasks. We must keep from falling prey to the temptation to reduce Christian communities to “social agencies.” We must respect the autonomy and proper competence of civil society, in conformity with the *social teaching of the Church*. This corresponds to the efforts of the Magisterium, particularly throughout the twentieth century, “to interpret social realities in the light of the Gospel” (no. 52) and to offer solutions to what have become global problems. “The ethical and social aspect of the question is an essential element of Christian witness: we must reject the temptation to offer a privatized and individualistic spirituality which ill accords with the demands of charity, to say nothing of the implications of the Incarnation and, in the last analysis, of Christianity’s eschatological tension. While that tension makes us aware of the relative character of history, it in no way implies that we withdraw from ‘building’ history” (no. 52). The text here refers to *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 34.

Symptoms of the Crisis

Of the “widespread and radical crisis” of the fundamental institution of the family we can observe numerous symptoms. Think of the growth in unwed couples, of the high percentage of divorces, of homosexual “marriages” recognized by law, sometimes even, as in Holland, including the right to adoption. Add to that the case either of women who procure motherhood for themselves while refusing marriage (artificial insemination), or of the choice of a marriage that excludes children in principle with, as a consequence, the fall in the birth rate in certain countries of the West. The fact that the French parliament has adopted legislation like PACS⁴ is indicative of the confusion that holds sway in many minds.

⁴ *Pacte Civil de Solidarité*: a law that gives some similar advantages to both unwed heterosexual or homosexual and married couples alike.

What are the factors that have led to the present situation? An initial diagnosis will show factors of an economic, sociological, and demographic nature.

Our industrial societies have originated migratory movements toward economic poles that produce urban agglomerations where people often lose their cultural roots. The situation of women in the workforce, which is now a large-scale phenomenon, is often a response to economic necessity, at the same time that it represents a certain legitimate autonomy. The uncertainty of work, the threat of unemployment, the rhythms and schedules of work are factors as well. And the effect is cumulative, which presents an obstacle to a healthy family life when these factors are not prevented. The rupture between the generations (the old, the young) can be added to this enumeration.

Women's liberation requires an in-depth analysis. The excesses and deviations of a certain kind of feminism must not overshadow the legitimate demands that are aimed at the full recognition of the rights and the dignity of persons.⁵ Still, one cannot ignore the strong tensions that exist between the vocation of motherhood and family life on the one hand and the demands of a profession and a career on the other. In these matters Christians should be pioneers and work for adequate legislation (part-time work, family aid, increased value of work at home, etc.).

Among the negative factors, mention must be made of the demand for an equality understood as the denial of the differences and specific traits of femininity. Here equality is conceived of as being identified with the male model, as mimicry. Awareness of the female and male identity is thereby obscured. This gives rise to a slew of serious problems that must be confronted. Failure to do so has contributed to the weakening of marriage, with negative consequences for the life of the family and of children.

⁵ Cf. Anne-Marie Pelletier, *Le christianisme et les femmes, Vingt siècles d'histoire* (Paris: Cerf, 2001); and Pia Francesca de Solenni, *A Hermeneutic of Aquinas's Mens through Differentiated Epistemology: Toward an Understanding of Woman as Imago Dei* (Rome: Apollinare Studi, 2000).

The Cultural Dimension

With the reference to feminism, our analysis becomes oriented toward cultural problems. Here sociological analysis runs up against basic problems whose meaning it cannot fully determine. The most profound cause of the crisis lies in a certain conception of man, namely the ideology of philosophical liberalism.⁶ It is necessary to specify *philosophical* liberalism, for the word liberalism, which harkens back to liberty, is a polyvalent term. Among the different meanings there certainly exists a connection, but, according to the level of one's usage, the word does not always retain the root sense by which we understand it. Thus one will speak of economic liberalism to say that free initiative is the main catalyst of economic life. Economic liberalism may draw its inspiration from philosophical liberalism, but that is not always the case. A similar observation must be made regarding political liberalism, which commonly designates the recognition of political liberties.

If I allude to these derived meanings, it is because through the interpretation one gives them, they may also function as vehicles of philosophical liberalism. One consequence of this is that such an ideology—for we are dealing with an ideology—does not come across with the aggressiveness that characterized Marxist communism. The modern totalitarianisms were born in great part (this is especially true of communism) as a violent reaction against the nineteenth century's unbridled economic liberalism that had no social restraints or correctives. With the downfall of communism, liberty, which for many meant the recovery of the rights of the person, was interpreted as the victory of liberalism, as though the exercise of recovered freedoms afforded it an historical confirmation.

Noteworthy Characteristics of Philosophical Liberalism

How do we characterize the ideology of philosophical liberalism, which constitutes the great challenge that we must meet? It seems to me that one can describe it with the following traits.

Man is an autonomous and free individual: *individual* and *freedom* are the essential elements of this definition. The notion of

⁶ Cf. my "Libéralisme philosophique et nihilisme éthique," in *Questions de la modernité* (Paris: FAC, 1985), 107–28.

individuality implies self-sufficiency (“man, this little god”) according to Rousseau’s formula. Relationship, openness to the other, does not enter into this definition. This individual naturally tends toward *happiness*, understood in the sense of eudaemonism and often of hedonism.

As for *freedom*, this is understood in the sense of transcendence. Rousseau, who is otherwise a deist and who speaks of the natural law, expressed the fundamental tendency of the ideology we are seeking to describe when he enunciated a principle of his political philosophy: The law that one gives oneself is freedom. Ideology broadens the scope of the assertion. The individual is sovereign. This sovereignty is even claimed in the face of the transcendent. Man is thus the source of law and right. One acknowledged attribute of this individual enters into the definition of man: *freedom*, that is, autonomous freedom. If we ask ourselves what is the relationship of the individual to society, the answer is that the individual is primary. Man can therefore be defined both prior to and independently of any interpersonal relationship.

Consequently, Aristotle’s language of man as a social animal, man as social by nature, has been abandoned. Society is no longer considered necessary for man’s good, and no more is it a question of the “common good” (which, in the present context, is a meaningless term). Rather, society represents a necessary evil, and is required for the protection of the individual’s freedom, which extends until it runs up against the freedom of another. In this way, the freedom of another is seen as a kind of limit. Since society is not an original reality, it is the result of a *contract* of free individuals, the goal of which is protection against the inevitable abuses that arise in reciprocal relationships. No longer is it a question of nature but of the “state of nature.” This idea is on the order of myth, inasmuch as it designates the situation before the social contract, such as we may imagine it.

This situation is logically conceived of as one of conflict. Think of the *homo homini lupus* of Hobbes. The function of the sovereign, or of government, is to defend freedom against itself and against the freedom of the other. In this view, the relationship between freedom (of the individual) and political power is itself one of conflict. Law opposes freedom; it is oppressive. We touch here, no doubt, on the

reason why, in conformity with the spirit of philosophical liberalism, people have the tendency to relegate to the private sector a string of problems that concern relations between persons.

In the Republican slogan of 1789, "liberty, equality, fraternity," the third term, by virtue of the logic of philosophical liberalism, has been just about forgotten.

The Conception of Marriage

The definition of man as an individual, which is at the basis of philosophical liberalism's ideology, has a direct impact on the conception of marriage. As we have seen, man is defined prior to the existence of his relationships and social ties. This holds for the interpersonal relationships between man and woman in the contract of marriage. Only one attribute—freedom—enters into the definition of the individual. The essence of man, his nature, is freedom.

Certainly one does not deny the existence of other properties—that would be absurd—but they come afterward, in second place. They are not so necessary as to deny the essence should they be missing; they are accidental. This holds true for the capacity either for dialogue or for the capacity for mutual giving. The individual's freedom is autonomous: It decides of itself. What we observe today are attitudes and stances inscribed, from the start, in the principles of philosophical liberalism.

We must ask questions, therefore, about the very content of freedom, since the debate centers on the nature of human freedom. Following the liberal conception, to say that freedom is autonomous is equivalent to saying that it is self-founding (at least such is the logical development of this conception). Here the concept of nature has changed; it loses its metaphysical meaning, such that the orientation of nature toward its connatural purposes, which indicate the design of the Creator, is ignored. One can speak of man's nature only if this designates freedom: Man, that is, the individual, *is* his autonomous freedom and nothing else. The exercise of freedom is no longer regulated by norms inscribed in man by the Creator (the natural law). To be sure, this idea of autonomous freedom is destroyed if one admits such norms. Freedom by itself is its own norm; it obeys only itself. According to this conception of freedom, *nature* becomes the *other*, the *other* that must be subdued,

and which no longer has anything ethically normative about it. In other words, the metaphysical meaning of nature is suppressed. With respect to nature, only technical domination remains. Freedom asserts itself *against* nature, gaining its ever-increasing space throughout the course of history.

At this point, a concept of culture arises with a growing force that is today greatly inflated. The less one attributes to nature, the realm of necessities and servitudes, the more one attributes to culture inasmuch as it is man's historical creation.

From these ideas a peculiar conception of marriage emerges. Sexuality is extrinsic to man's nature (in the metaphysical sense of essence); it belongs to nature as a kind of limitation, a conditioning of freedom. What is extrinsic to man's essence is, for freedom, either an obstacle or something to be used. Put another way, sexuality appears as an object that freedom uses. It does not carry a meaning that expresses the design of the Creator. And it is precisely culture that concerns the realm of using and of what freedom uses. The meaning of the reality that freedom uses is a creation of this same freedom. Freedom determines the significance of sexuality and its use; freedom bestows this significance. The idea of an objective moral law that would indicate the ethical meaning of the subject's free activity has no place here. Rather, such a law is thought of as an obstacle, a hindrance to the full exercise of freedom. One talks then about a *taboo* that must be rejected and about the body as a thing that one disposes of as one pleases. Frequently used expressions such as "straight or gay couples" faithfully reflect this very conception we are here describing.

This conception entails another consequence. Culture, a human creation, is historical. It cannot be fixed once and for all, as if it were rigid. Instead, it is subject to change and is therefore relative. Sexual activity—let us speak no more of a man and a woman, that is too restrictive—can take a multiplicity of forms, all legitimate, because it is the task of human freedom to determine their relevance. And thus the multiplicity of the models of sexual union are presented, all equally valid.

Another consequence: If the body, and consequently sexuality, is extrinsic to the person identified with freedom alone, sexuality finds itself trivialized. This trivialization goes hand-in-hand with a

widely spread eroticism, in which there is no contradiction, at least from the moment that sexuality is detached from responsibility. What is sought are pleasures whose quality is determined by freedom alone.

In short, anthropological dualism is behind the rupture between union and fecundity, diagnosed by *Humanae Vitae*, and which is certainly one of the factors of the present crisis.

An Ideology

Thus the body is extrinsic to the person, who is freedom, and freedom determines the use of the body in a sovereign manner. Of course, what I have described is the inner logic of a system that usually does not present itself so categorically. Human nature does not cease to make its voice heard, as there is still the sense that choices cannot be purely arbitrary: They depend on *conscience*. But a new conception of conscience ensues from this. Conscience is no longer the authority that determines and dictates, in a specific context, the application of the objective moral law to a deed to be done or forbidden, or the judgment of an act once it has been done. In this new conception, it is the individual conscience that decrees good and evil in a sovereign fashion. Thus conscience is absorbed by the individual's freedom, which is self-positing.

I have spoken of philosophical liberalism as an ideology. Such an identification is important. As we have noted, we do not find ourselves confronted by clear and rigorous philosophical systems. To speak of ideology is to say that the ideas in question exert their influence in a more or less underground fashion, without ever being fully elucidated. Imprecision belongs to ideology. This latter is like the air we breathe unawares. In this sense, its action is sly and shift. This ideology signifies a set of active tendencies which oppose other tendencies, such as the fundamental reflexes of human nature or an authentic moral sense. These latter tendencies are more deeply rooted than ideological tendencies, even though the ideological tendencies are vigorously promoted by the mass media.

If philosophical liberalism, as ideology, does not come across with an aggressiveness comparable to that of Marxist ideology, this does not exclude a latent situation of conflict between tendencies, and the resulting concessions and compromises it never fails to produce.

The framework of liberal ideology is characterized by its focus on freedom and on freedom as an essential prerogative of the person. Thus the conflict is between two conceptions of freedom. Sartre, whom we may consider a philosopher of the liberal ideology in its libertarian form, rejects, when he speaks of the human condition, the idea of human nature in the metaphysical sense. For him, there exists a contradictory opposition between freedom and nature. In the final analysis, it is here that we find the crux of the debate.

We cannot overemphasize the dominant ideology of Western societies. Man is the individual; he is defined by his freedom, as freedom is the person. To speak of an objective moral law is to put a limitation on freedom. Individual freedom, through conscience, determines good and evil like a sovereign.

Legislation inspired by liberalism will tend to put the greatest number of problems in the sphere of private life. For example, is abortion a crime or not? It is for the individual to determine. That is why, in the defense of life, the first thing needed is to help people rediscover the existence of an objective moral law that holds normative value for human (civil) law. The first mistake is to make of the wickedness of abortion an exclusive question of individual conscience (of freedom).

We should note that the logic of liberalism rejects the idea of common moral standards and of the handing on of moral values by way of mores. The common sense, the mores, are looked upon as countless taboos and prejudices to be fought. Freedom alone, sheltered from all pressure, is entitled to judge validly. To have recourse to the moral sense of the people is to be immediately accused of anachronism, of obscurantism, of cultural retardation, of anti-democratic dogmatism. The paradox is that those who most often claim autonomy for the individual conscience do nothing but echo the dominant opinion.

The ideology of philosophical liberalism, with the instinctive reflexes it leads to, is an illustration of the divorce between freedom and truth spelled out in *Veritatis Splendor*.

A Cultural Question

If, as I hope, the analysis put forward is correct, it is clear that we cannot be satisfied with isolated remedies, although sometimes

emergencies make them necessary. We must go to the root, which is of a cultural nature; this is a matter of the conception of man, of the truth about man.

As regards new challenges that arise in the realm of biotechnologies, which also concern marriage and the family, *Novo Millennio Ineunte* no. 51, as we have seen, invites us to make every effort to explain the motives for the Church's position. It is not a question of imposing the vision of the faith on non-believers, but of interpreting and defending values that are rooted in the very nature of the human being. This observation must be received in the light of *Fides et Ratio*.

What is at stake is the conception of man as reason can naturally grasp it, even if Revelation confirms and broadens the horizon of such a conception. We should avoid presenting this conception as if it were of a sectarian nature, that is, as if it were inspired solely by a confessed faith. The broad outlines of a Christian anthropology—for this is what this is about—are found in *Gaudium et Spes*. The conciliar text itself gathers the fruits of a long tradition of thought and experience.

I would like to raise some points that seem to me to be of major importance. The work of culture that is required means that it is necessary to bring an inspiration to the basic orientations of culture. Thought is therefore needed, which requires thinkers who go to the root of the problems. This is indispensable if the great challenges of this age are to be confronted adequately. But the work of thinking demands a great pedagogical effort on various levels. Ideology seduces and takes control to the extent that it meets with a vacuum of ignorance or muddled and superficial ideas. This effort presupposes the courageous confidence in reason of which *Fides et Ratio* speaks.

Created Freedom

Two problems must be given particular consideration. The first one bears upon the meaning of *created freedom*. At the core of the liberal conception there is, implicitly or explicitly, the identification of human freedom with freedom alone, *überhaupt*. Thus human freedom becomes absolute freedom, which places us in the logic of immanence. In this perspective we understand the gravity of the

phenomenon of secularization. This signifies not only the fact of putting God in parentheses in order to busy oneself with worldly affairs alone, but, more radically, the fact of deciding by oneself in an autonomous manner without reference to Him and His moral law.

Man must see himself as he is, a creature. His existence is a response to a vocation, in the first meaning of the word. A vocation demands a response. It belongs to created freedom to be a responding freedom—responsible. To the call of God—or vocation—through the moral law and conscience, the person must answer of himself. Thus created freedom has the nature of a dialogue. Man is a person insofar as, by virtue of his spirituality, he is capable of consciousness and love, which also means openness and generosity.

The created person, inasmuch as he is created, naturally aspires to personal communion with Him who is his source—with God. Interpersonal dialogue, occurring in love as a gift, has its foundation in the original dialogue with God, the Source of created freedom. To take away this foundation is to sterilize the possibility of dialogue at its root, to open the way to behavior that treats the other as an object—an object of pleasure or of interest. Such is no doubt the most destructive consequence of secularization. It is not by chance that one speaks not so much of the person but of the individual. The individual is comparable to the monad of Leibniz, “without windows.” The phrase that one reads in Maritain and Mounier, “personal and communal,” has great depth.

It is possible that secularism, through indifferentism all the way to its most radical expressions in atheism, has, culturally speaking, arrived at its end in western civilization. Ethical atheism, however, remains very present in certain sectors of biotechnological research. But what is filtering through little by little is the consciousness of emptiness and nihilism as the final stage of secularism. Culture must rediscover the religious man (*homo religiosus*) in his truth (for religious deviations exist as well).

A second rediscovery is needed: that of *nature* in its metaphysical sense, and more directly of human nature with its corollary, the natural law. The awareness of creaturehood favors the rediscovery of nature in its goodness and beauty. If created freedom is revealed as the subject of a vocation, the first words of this calling are those

that nature itself suggests, inasmuch as nature expresses God's original plan. The natural law, inscribed in reason, is the immediate intimation of the demands of nature itself tending toward its ends or toward its fulfillment and perfection. This nature, which tends toward its perfection, bears the imprint of divine wisdom.

The human person is composed of a spiritual soul and body. The body is not foreign or exterior to the person, it is an integral part. It is a body endowed with sexuality with all the spiritual overtones this entails by virtue of the body's substantial union with the soul. This is why sexuality is itself a vocation and its responsible exercise is a response to this vocation. We are here at the level of the person's creaturehood, knowable by reason, and not yet at the knowledge of faith concerning the sacredness of marriage between the baptized.

When Christian thought therefore maintains that marriage, by its very nature, is a total, unique, and indissoluble relation between a man and a woman, it reminds the man and the woman of their origin according to God's first plan; it recalls the authentic nature of marriage understandable by reason. For, once thought gets to a certain depth, it rediscovers what is original. In this way, then, Christian thought performs the work of culture.

Faith also enlightens us on the existential condition of nature, fallen into sin, healed and raised up again by grace. This consideration allows us to grasp the connection between the law of the Gospel and the original design of the Creator. This connection is not a reduction; the law of the Gospel, or the New Law, introduces the newness of grace. It would be fitting today, in this perspective, to pursue the reflection, to which St. Thomas attaches great importance, on the different stages (*status*) of God's law in human history. As regards marriage, we should reflect deeply on Jesus' words about *hardness of heart* (cf. Mt 19:8). In this essay, however, I cannot develop this point. My purpose in this essay is simply to show that the crisis of marriage is the result and the reflection of an anthropological crisis whose solution must be of an anthropological nature. **N V**

