

Toward an Understanding of Fruitfulness

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POPE PAUL VI'S encyclical *Humanae Vitae* sought to encourage man to live out "the highest vocation (*munus*) to fatherhood" (*HV*, §12) in the living memory that "the source of conjugal love is God, who is 'Love' (1 Jn 4:18) and who is the Father 'from whom all parenthood in heaven and earth receives its name' (Eph 3:15)" (*HV*, §8). The encyclical's invitation to embrace the highest call to parenthood responsibly (*HV*, §13) is truly understood only if one sees that this responsibility of the spouses is first and foremost their response to the permanent source of their love, the Father. This response takes place in his Son, whose Spirit, the giver of life, enables the spouses to encounter each other, to establish a communion of love that is indwelt by His love, and to fulfill in ever new ways the promise contained in their love. This paper seeks to show that spousal love is fruitful because its form is filial. Spousal love is filial both because it ultimately and ongoingly comes from its source, the Triune God, and also because the Giver has given, along with the gift, the capacity to give and to be fruitful. In this sense, as we will see, the stern call to "responsible parenthood" is a tender and courageous reminder that one can become father or mother only because one is oneself always being begotten.

In order to illustrate how paternity and maternity are truly "responsible" when they are an expression of the filial form of conjugal love, we will look first to an opposing view. We will see how some contemporary theological reflection in the wake of *Humanae Vitae* builds upon an anthropology in which the "person," rather than being understood in terms of childhood, is seen rather as an androgynous being with a self-determining, self-originated will, which takes its own autonomy as the measure of love and its very fruitfulness. The term filiality, when it

appears at all, seldom moves beyond a nominalistic or voluntaristic sense. Since it would be unrealistic to attempt to respond to the many voices and views here, for the sake of clarity, the first part of the paper will be limited to a critical examination of the influential work of M. G. Lawler. In particular, we shall consider his understanding of the experience of married love, which, in his view, requires a rejection of *Humanae Vitae*. The second part, then, in an attempt to account for *Humanae Vitae*'s assertion that the "highest mission of parenthood" must be conceived and lived in the memory of one's own childhood, retrieves an adequate conception of the experience of love that then grounds the particularly spousal experience of love and its call to fruitfulness. This second section will form the basis for the third section's account of the meaning of fruitfulness and fecundity that is presupposed by the encyclical.

The Rhetoric of Experience

One of the many significant contributions of the Second Vatican Council grew out of its awareness of the modern dichotomy between life and faith, man and God. In response to this perceived dichotomy, the Council appealed to man's own "experience" to help him discover who he really is (*Gaudium et Spes*, §21) and to remind him of his own familiarity with the divine revealed mysteries (*Dei Verbum*, §8; GS, §13).¹ Experience, so the Council claims, is a means of access to a unified knowledge of oneself in relation to one's own self, to the world, and to God. In so doing, the Council's insight benefited from the Magisterium's critique of the modernist understanding of experience and also retrieved a term that the Church had regarded with suspicion since the council of Trent.² Referring to many of the contributions of Vatican Council II, Lawler ascribes great significance to the role experience plays in theological reflection. His concept of experience, however, is sociologically interpreted to mean, simply, what it is that married couples live out and do. According to Lawler, this experience lacks intrinsic meaning and its

¹ See Alessandro Maggiolini, "Magisterial Teaching on Experience in the Twentieth Century: From the Modernist Crisis to the Second Vatican Council," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 23 (1996): 225–43. See also Angelo Bertuletti, "Il concetto di esperienza," in *L'evidenza e la Fede*, ed. G. Colombo (Milan: Glossa, 1988), 112–81.

² Pius X, "Encyclical Pascendi," in *The Doctrines of the Modernists (The Encyclical Pascendi of Pope Pius X)* and *Modernist Errors (The Decree Lamentabili of July 4, 1907)*, ed. L. Watt (London: Catholic Truth Society, 1937). Behind the retrieval of the concept of experience also lies the reflection on the meaning of action. See Maurice Blondel, *L'action* (1893). *Essai d'une critique de la vie et d'une science de la pratique* (Paris: Quadrige/PUF, 1993).

cultural interpretation is thus unavoidable.³ Faithfulness to the concrete experience of married couples, which indicates the increase of divorce and use of contraception, calls in Lawler's view for a reconsideration (or a re-reception, in his terms) of the meaning of fruitfulness and of the Church's declaration on contraception.⁴

To understand the meaning of fruitfulness in a way that does justice to the data collected from the experience of married couples, says Lawler, it is necessary to examine the conceptual framework according to which fruitfulness is understood, that is, the theological reflection on the ends of marriage and the undergirding conception of marriage itself. Lawler sets out to ground his rejection of *Humanae Vitae* historically, but the understanding of marriage he presents is limited to a primarily anthropological, rather than theologically grounded, perspective, and the reading he offers of the history of the development of doctrine regarding the

³ Lawler follows Rahner's appreciation of pastoral theology and Lonergan's theological method. See, for example, Michael G. Lawler, *What Is and What Ought to Be* (New York: Continuum, 2005), 44–67.

⁴ "The sociological evidence," says Lawler, "is clear: what is in virtually the whole church is a re-reception of the doctrines of divorce and remarriage, and contraception. I further suggest that it is about past time to acknowledge theologically and to teach magisterially that re-reception as not only what is but also what *ought to be* the belief of the future church." Later on he writes: "The question can be put baldly here: How can anyone say that *the church believes* that artificial contraception and remarriage after civil divorce and without annulment are morally wrong when some 89 percent of the communion-church does not believe the former and some 64 former percent does not believe the latter? . . . [T]his does not prove anything theologically. It does however, raise questions that converted theologians cannot ignore" (Lawler, *What Is and What Ought to Be*, 170). This book is Lawler's methodological synthesis of his previous work. See also his *Marriage and the Catholic Church: Disputed Questions* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2002); idem, *Secular Marriage, Christian Sacrament: A Theology of Christian Marriage* (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1985); idem, *Symbol and Sacrament: A Contemporary Sacramental Theology* (Omaha, NE: Creighton University Press, 1995); idem, *Ecumenical Marriage and Remarriage: Gifts and Challenges to the Churches* (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1990); Michael G. Lawler and Thomas J. Shanahan, *Church: A Spirited Communion* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1995); Center for Marriage and Family, *Marriage Preparation in the Catholic Church: Getting It Right* (Omaha, NE: Creighton University Press, 1995); *Christian Marriage and Family: Contemporary Theological and Pastoral Perspectives*, eds. Michael G. Lawler and William P. Roberts (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1996); Lawler, *Family: American and Christian* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 1997); idem, *Marriage and Sacrament: A Theology of Christian Marriage* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1993); Center for Marriage and Family, *Time, Sex, and Money: The First Five Years of Marriage* (Omaha, NE: Creighton University Press, 2000).

ends of marriage has far-reaching limitations.⁵ He determines that this history can be classified according to three heuristic models. The first model, extending from the second to the twentieth century, views marriage as an institution whose *raison d'être* is procreation. In view of Augustine's conception of the goods of marriage and Aquinas's reinterpretation of them as ends, Lawler contends that in this first model the faithfulness of the spouses to each other (*fides*) and the indissolubility and sacramentality of their union (*sacramentum*) are secondary to and dependent upon offspring.⁶ Lawler argues that this model is typified by the 1917 Code of Canon Law, which defines marriage as a contract in 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"

⁵ Lawler's understanding of sacrament and of marriage relies heavily on Edward Schillebeeckx. See his *Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1963); idem, *Marriage: Human Reality and Saving Mystery*, trans. N. D. Smith (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1965); idem, "Christian Marriage and the Reality of Complete Marital Breakdown," in *Catholic Divorce: The Deception of Annulments*, ed. Pierre Hegy and Joseph Martos (New York: Continuum, 2000), 82–107. See Lawler, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 5–62 and 176–215. Lawler does mention Rahner's understanding of God and pastoral theology but makes little use of his concept of marriage and symbolic ontology. A less biased historical account of marriage would have allowed him to see that the understanding of the Church moves from the consideration of marriage as a state of life in dialogue with virginity; to an elaboration of marriage as a sacrament, once the ages of the persecutions passed and the Church had to define before the world what is specific about her identity; through the controversies with the rising liberal state that understood marriage exclusively as a contract on which the state had the final say; to the contemporary understanding of marriage as sacrament and state of life. For an account of the historical development of marriage, see among others: P. Adnès, *Le Mariage* (Paris: Desclée, 1963); *Christian Marriage: A Historical Study*, ed. Glenn W. Olsen (New York: Crossroads, 2001); Juan Francisco Muñoz García, *El matrimonio, misterio y signo*, 5 vols. (Pamplona: EUNSA, 1971–1982). See John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, trans. Michael Waldstein (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 2006); Angelo Scola, *The Nuptial Mystery*, trans. Michelle K. Borras (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005); Marc Ouellet, *Divine Likeness. Toward a Trinitarian Anthropology of the Family*, trans. Philip Milligan and Linda Cicone (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006).

⁶ Lawler, *What Is*, 153–64; idem, *Marriage and the Catholic Church*, 27–42. Augustine, *De Bono Coniugali* (PL 40), bk. 1. Aquinas has a more nuanced understanding of the ends of marriage than Lawler's account might seem to grant. See his *Commentary on the Sentences* IV, dd. 26–42; *Supplementum*, qq. 41–68; and *Summa contra Gentiles* III, 123–26, 137; IV, 78. Bonaventure's treatment of marriage in his *Commentary on the Sentences* IV, dd. 26–29, is also useful here.

(canon §1081, 2).⁷ This is true, but Lawler does not elaborate here on the difference between canon law's normative authority to define and distinguish, which is one thing, and its role in developing theological reflection, which cannot be reductively equated with his necessarily spare and seemingly clinical definitions. Reacting to, among other things, the Lambeth Conference's approval of the morality of artificial contraception, and drawing on Dietrich von Hildebrand and Heribert Doms's personalistic reflections on marriage, Lawler contends that Pius XI's *Casti Connubii* (1930) "introduced for the first time in theological history a new ecclesial doctrine, namely procreation as the end of sexual intercourse rather than the end of marriage."⁸ With this second stage, says Lawler, the Church moved from a procreative model of marriage to one of procreative-union. Here the conjugal union takes precedence over the offspring, which is reduced to a "part" of married life. On this reading of marriage, the discussion regarding the nature of marriage begins to veer away from the "ends" of the conjugal act toward its nature.⁹ The final stage took place with *Gaudium et Spes*, a constitution which, according to Lawler, proposes "an entirely new and previously unheard-of Catholic model of marriage, a model of interpersonal union."¹⁰ Lawler notes that *Gaudium et Spes* examines the nature of marriage without using the language of ends and hierarchy, and thus abandons the prior legalistic, narrowly biological model of marriage. He defines what he means by "interpersonal union" first by reducing the discourse on marriage to the place and meaning of the conjugal union in married life, and then by

⁷ See, for example, Lawler, *Marriage and the Catholic Church*, 92–117. For the discussion of marriage as a contract, see Carlo Caffarra, "Marriage as a Reality in the Order of Creation and Marriage as a Sacrament," in *Contemporary Perspectives on Christian Marriage*, ed. Richard Malone and John R. Connery, S.J. (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1984), 117–80.

⁸ D. von Hildebrand and H. Doms are the two most frequently cited sources in Lawler's description of the "personalistic turn."

⁹ Lawler, *What Is*, 157. Theological reflection on marriage has moved from focusing its attention on the ends of marriage to studying the meaning of the conjugal act. The discussion regarding the ends has disappeared in a world that can no longer understand the meaning of causality and participation. Consequently, the debate has been reduced to the discussion of the meaning of the conjugal union. While this reflection, enhanced by a deeper knowledge of biology and a retrieval of the concept of person, has brought crucial insights to the reflection on marriage, as we will see in section three, it is necessary to incorporate the anthropological, Christological, Trinitarian, ecclesiological, sacramental, and nuptial dimensions of marriage to offer an adequate account of the meaning of conjugal love.

¹⁰ Lawler, *What Is*, 158; idem, *Marriage and the Catholic Church*, 33–37.

seeking to enlarge this horizon by explaining that the “interpersonal covenant,” which is the married “communion of life and love” (GS, §48), consists of many other aspects.¹¹ According to this third model, typified in the revised Canon Law (1987), what counts in marriage, then, is not so much the presence of children but rather the love that the spouses share with each other. An examination of Lawler’s conception of the human body and the meaning of love can help us understand the way he accounts for the relation between conjugal union and offspring.

This third model moves away from a too narrow identification of sexuality with genitality, which by definition is unable to distinguish human from subhuman sexuality, toward a concept of sexuality specific to the human person who is “a spiritual animal, vitalized by a human soul.” Lawler argues that experience witnesses to the fact that conjugal union, more than the fusion of two bodies, is the fusion of two ensouled bodies, two persons. This, for Lawler, means that “the primary end of sexual intercourse is the marital union between the spouses,” and not procreation.¹² “To get really real about sexuality and sexual activity in the modern world, the exclusive connection between sexual intercourse and procreation,” therefore, “has to be abandoned.”¹³ The fact that the conjugal acts of infertile couples or those acts that take place during times of nonfertility still preserve their intrinsic goodness—which is more than merely a remedy for concupiscence—makes it clear, says Lawler, that the conjugal union should be viewed under this personalistic reading.

Specifying that he does not diminish the importance of offspring, Lawler argues that the persons and their mutual love are what determine the nature of marriage. Conjugal union expresses nuptial, personal intimacy, pleasure, and at times, though not necessarily always, is also a means for reproduction. In this view, fruitfulness has to do first and foremost with the well-being of the couple, their “spiritual communion.”¹⁴ This split

¹¹ Lawler, *What Is*, 162; idem, *Marriage and the Catholic Church*, 36.

¹² Lawler, *Marriage and the Catholic Church*, 35.

¹³ Ibid., 177. This separation between sex and procreation also justifies cohabitation, which, according to Lawler, should be open to offspring. See ibid., 162–92. Karol Wojtyła and Angelo Scola, among others, also seek to integrate a personal understanding of the conjugal act. Their studies, however, arrive at the inseparability of the three different elements forming the nuptial mystery: unity, sexual difference, procreation. See K. Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, trans. H. T. Willetts (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), 224–44; and Scola, *Nuptial Mystery*, 3–52.

¹⁴ It is true, as Lawler indicates, that it is the love of the spouses that matters most for the offspring. The reciprocal love of the parents is crucial for the education of their children. See Lawler, *Family*, 166–75; idem, *Marriage and Sacrament*, 69ff. Nevertheless, emphasizing this point to the extent of breaking the intrinsic link

between the personal and the biological/genital dimensions of sexuality, however, indicates that the sexed body only partially expresses the person. The dichotomy here between the personal and the biological in spousal procreativity reaches its logical conclusion in Lawler's affirmation that, as the experience of "monogamous, loving, committed homosexual relationships" witnesses, there is no need to contend "that personal complementarity can only be realized in and through genital complementarity."¹⁵ The bodily union of the "one flesh" is personal before it is biological/genital, which means that the union could include both heterosexual and homosexual persons. Deprived of any ontological depth, sexuality, according to Lawler, now has a primarily cultural meaning and its right use consequently depends on the sexual orientation of the person—an orientation which he sees as innate and therefore normative.¹⁶ His

between the proles and the spousal love handicaps Lawler's conception of the relation between conjugal love and offspring. This relation is crucial because fecundity is a dimension of unity, not its outcome. In this regard, there is much talk about the meaning of fruitfulness in Lawler's work, but reflection on the meaning of childhood is basically absent. This lack contributes to the incomplete character of the understanding of marriage's fruitfulness underlying Lawler's account. A very interesting account of the consequence for children of this division between conjugal love and proles, which is at the root of so many divorces, can be seen in Elizabeth Marquardt's sociologically grounded work, *Between Two Worlds: The Inner Lives of Children of Divorce* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2005).

¹⁵ Todd A. Salzman and Michael G. Lawler, "New Natural Law Theory and Foundational Sexual Ethical Principles: A Critique and a Proposal," *Heythrop Journal* 47 (2006): 182–205. For a similar reflection, see also their "Quaestio Disputata. Catholic Sexual Ethics: Complementarity and the Truly Human," *Theological Studies* 67 (2006): 625–52. A few years earlier Rowan Williams reached the same conclusion. See his "The Body's Grace," in *Theology and Sexuality: Classic and Contemporary Readings*, ed. Eugene Rogers (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 309–21.

¹⁶ For Lawler, sexuality, in fact, could mean "either security through fertility or role definition or cooperation with God in a sacred created activity" (*Symbol and Sacrament*, 178). Another important consequence of this proposal of the body's incapacity to adequately express the person is Lawler's conviction that a single conjugal act does not fully communicate personal love. He claims that a marriage is "consummated" only after several years of common life together, in which the spouses have had numerous occasions to physically express a loving unity and to share life together. See, among others, Lawler, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 202–3; idem, *Marriage and the Catholic Church*, 100–101; idem, *Secular Marriage*, 82, 109. While it is true that history deepens love and that the human soul cannot be identified with the body, Lawler's principle of totality, according to which married life is seen as a whole with a loose connection to its parts, evacuates the meaning of a single conjugal act and hence is unable to adequately account for incarnate human freedom. In the natural language of the body the spiritual word of love expresses itself with precision and freedom in bodily form.

personalist interpretation of genital complementarity, which sees the physical genitals as organs of the whole person, including his or her sexual orientation, allows [him] to expand the definition of the natural, reasonable, and therefore moral sexual act to include both heterosexuals and homosexuals.¹⁷

Lawler approaches love in its three aspects as *eros*, *agape*, and *philia*. In terms of the place within married love of *eros*, “that rambunctious, irrational, and selfish component of human love,” Lawler says that “when it dominates there is never mutuality and equality; there is only the selfish drive to dominate and to use.”¹⁸ Nevertheless, and without playing down the erotic dimension, Lawler writes that spousal love is, first of all, *agape*. Spouses love each other for their own sake. Agapic love considers the other as equal to oneself and hence married love, to be true and human, must be perfectly symmetrical. Lawler’s theological reflection is unable to come out from under the shadow of the theology of the manuals. His treatment of canon law remains legalistic, and here he reads agapic love predominantly through the virtue of justice and the lens of equality. To affirm any difference between the spouses is seen as unjustly pitting the one against the other and as leading inevitably to hierarchical subservience.¹⁹ The human person is conceived as an individual who first possesses certain inviolable rights, and then at a second moment freely decides to enter into marriage and let his “I” become a “We.”²⁰ For Lawler, agapic love is therefore mainly

¹⁷ Salzman and Lawler, “New Natural Law Theory,” 198. It is important to note that the concept of person, as a unity of body and soul, does not inform Lawler’s conception of the conjugal act. His texts leave the reader wondering in what way the soul informs the body. The anthropology he presents identifies conception with (animal) reproduction and the personal with the unitive dimension of conjugal love. In this view, then, the body is a neutral instrument of the personal will that seeks union with another human person.

¹⁸ Lawler, *Marriage and Sacrament*, 100.

¹⁹ I am not lobbying, of course, for a separation of justice and love, and I recognize Lawler’s claim to ground equality in man’s image of the divine. However, it is important to consider the relation between love and justice carefully. To think of love in terms of justice, and to do so without critically sifting “justice” from, e.g., its common distributive conception, leads to an identification of love with power. The relation with another, then, always remains dialectic, equivocal, or questionable. See Lawler, *Marriage and Sacrament*, 98–102; idem, *Christian Marriage and the Family*, 22ff. For a reflection on the circularity between justice and love, see John Paul II, *Dives in Misericordia*; idem, *Dominum et Vivificantem*. The last section of this paper suggests a more adequate framework for the understanding of love.

²⁰ While it is true that the spouses are equal since they are created in the image of God, as we shall see in the third section, the claim of radical symmetry between the spouses eliminates the notion of difference between male and female, which

a love of friendship, which alone “can mandate the reciprocal consent to love.” “Why,” asks Lawler, “would a man and a woman freely choose to yield their individual rights and become a coupled-We for life? A short answer is because they wish to be best friends for life.”²¹ While it is true that love seeks only to affirm the other while allowing oneself to be defined by the beloved, Lawler’s understanding of love does not only set aside any discourse on “the ends of marriage”; it results in making the goods of marriage extrinsic to love itself. Procreation, faithfulness, and sacramentality, in this view, always simply follow a free decision of the person and are subordinate to man’s initiative. Indeed, they enrich human married love but they do not constitute an integral part of it; their presence or absence does not affect the nature of love.²²

In fact, Lawler contends that these heuristic models do not claim to define the “nature” of married love. A theoretical model “is an imaginative construct, postulated by analogy with a familiar reality and used to construct a theory to correlate a set of observations.” At the Second Vatican Council, Lawler tells us, the Church changed her way of accounting for the reality of marriage, because the cultural, sociological, political, and economic context of marriage had changed. Lawler’s theology therefore seeks to correlate the present experience (of marriage) with the theological tradition while maintaining their equal status.²³ Theology is empirical—not deductive or upheld by a metaphysics, he says, because “experience and not ontology makes reality”²⁴; correlational—it does not look for causes but for a relation between past and present that gives equal importance to both; and probabilistic—seeking for certainty would be form of a-historical thinking that lacked the necessary integration of sociology and theology. What these models claim to

then reappears in the guise of unjust inequality. Lawler’s conception of person can also be found in Lawler, *Christian Marriage and the Family*, 38–58; idem, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 201–9; idem, *Secular Marriage*, 59–61; idem, *Marriage and the Catholic Church*, 43–65, 162–92.

²¹ Lawler, *Marriage and the Catholic Church*, 154. The long answer is his re-examination of the doctrine regarding the ends of marriage. See also idem, *Marriage and Sacrament*, 98–104; idem, *Christian Marriage and the Family*, 22–28, 32–33.

²² Granted, my comments presume the existence of this or that “nature”; on the opposing view, of there being no such thing as nature, it becomes possible to defend divorce and cohabitation, along with contraception.

²³ Lawler, embracing Rahner’s theory of the supernatural existential, contends that present experience can and does illumine tradition and past theological reflection because our present is “graced.” This, according to him, means that contemporary experience has equal status with tradition; any experience is, in this sense, revelatory. This is why he rejects Tillich’s and Tracy’s understanding of correlation. See Lawler, *What Is*, 1–24 and 77–88.

²⁴ Ibid., 48.

do, then, is to be faithful to the reality of marriage as it is experienced by believers and nonbelievers alike. None of the models, not even the interpersonal one, claims to account exhaustively for the empirical data collected by sociological sciences. They remain open-ended and their validity resides in their capacity “to explain all the observations that [they] seek to explain.”²⁵

Lawler claims that the existence of different models of marriage does not presuppose a relativistic theology. Rather, multiple models must exist because God is an unfathomable mystery. Following Rahner’s interpretation of God, Lawler believes that no theological or sociological attempt to account for the reality of marriage can claim to pronounce definitively on that human and divine reality. The historical development of these models is a sign of scientific progress. Although it is not the final word on marriage, the interpersonal model is the most accurate evaluation of the sociologically retrieved data on the experience of married life produced by the Church.²⁶ Lawler contends that *Gaudium et Spes*’s interpersonal model as he reads it should guide the way married couples live their intimate communion of life and love.²⁷ What married couples within the ecclesial community do, however, is more than just the living out of Christian doctrine as designed by theologians. The ecclesial community shapes and generates doctrine. Lawler’s understanding of the Church as *communio*—that is, the Church is neither a “democracy” nor a “monarchy” but rather a “super-diocese”—leads him to argue that the members of the Church must freely receive a doctrine “presented to [them] as apostolic truth and ecclesial faith,” after “critical judgment of the data.” This reception has to do with the relevance or irrelevance of a teaching, not its truth. Lawler contends that only if it is considered relevant, can a teaching be taken as part of the belief of the Church, though

²⁵ Lawler, *Marriage and the Catholic Church*, 28–29.

²⁶ This quote may help in grasping his understanding of the complementarity of theology and sociology: “for the theological *prescription* of what *ought to be* to be realistic it should be preceded by the sociological *description* of what *is*. Karl Rahner puts it well. The task of practical theology is both description and evaluation of the present world and ecclesial situation. For description, theology relies on social science; for evaluation of the present situation, theology distills this description in the still of ecclesial and theological perspective” (Lawler, *What Is*, 42).

²⁷ “The action required by the interpersonal union model is quite different: the procreation and nurturing of the relationship between the spouses, a relationship that is mutually loving, faithful, self-sacrificing, just, companionate, forgiving, and peaceful. In a marriage, the time to procreate children is when the spousal relationship is sound and the climate, therefore, right for the procreation of children and their positive nurture into functioning adults” (Lawler, *Marriage and the Catholic Church*, 38).

he offers only the sociological reading of experience as a criterion for judging “relevancy.”²⁸

In this understanding, the interpersonal model of marriage, however, is still in the process of being-received by the Church. Echoing an early critique of *Humanae Vitae*, Lawler claims that Paul VI’s encyclical represents a step back because, unlike the interpersonal reading of marriage, it still proposes the biologicistic, procreative reading. *Humanae Vitae*, then, could not be seen as in continuity with *Gaudium et Spes*. Contrary to what Paul VI thought, Lawler considers “the majority report” as the judgment that is truly faithful to the Conciliar doctrine on marriage. Had Paul VI allowed the Council to decide on this moral issue, the outcome would have been altogether different. Lawler contends that, as was the case with usury, slavery, and religious freedom, the current official position of the Church on contraception as expressed in *Humanae Vitae* has not been received.²⁹ Since the rejection or “re-reception” of *Humanae Vitae* does “not make the traditional teaching necessarily false,” what matters, says Lawler, is to see that *Humanae Vitae* is utterly “irrelevant to the life of the whole church, a theological fact that has been abundantly documented by sociological research.”³⁰ He claims that “what is,”—i.e., what happens—“ought to be the belief of the future Church.”³¹ This conclusive statement in Lawler’s recent work leaves the reader wondering whether Lawler’s heuristic models and use of experience end up, in fact, doing what he claims they do not, namely, defining the *nature* of married love and fruitfulness. The alternative is to reduce “belief” to sheer opinion.

An attentive comparison of the two documents, however, reveals that *Humanae Vitae* continues and deepens the doctrine on marriage found in *Gaudium et Spes*.³² Both see marriage as originating from God who is Love (GS, §48; HV, §8); describe marriage as a communion of persons constituted by the self-gift of the spouses (GS, §49; HV, §8); elucidate the

²⁸ Lawler, *What Is*, 121. “The past,” writes Lawler “is always re-appropriated or re-received in the church.” See also idem, *Church* for his ecclesiological reflection.

²⁹ Lawler, *What Is*, 127–29.

³⁰ Ibid., 163.

³¹ If relevance and reception are the main criteria, one can still ask what the rejection of Christ’s message and his death on the cross in utter abandonment would mean for Christ’s claim to truth. Ultimately, it seems that Lawler’s theological methodology, with its consequent understanding of marriage, despite its claim to be concrete and compassionate, is unable to shed any significant light on the problem of evil and suffering experienced in every married life.

³² The following comments follow Alain Mattheeuws, *Union et procréation. Développement de la doctrine des fins du mariage* (Paris: Cerf, 1989), 124–31.

meaning of the conjugal act in positive terms and determine that it is ordered to expressing and enhancing the union of the spouses (GS, §49; HV, §11); and clarify that by nature marriage is ordered to the procreation and education of children (GS, §§48, 50; HV, §10–2). It is true that *Gaudium et Spes* indicates that marriage “is not instituted solely for procreation” (GS, §50); yet it also clarifies that the morality of the conjugal acts “does not depend solely on sincere intentions or on an evaluation of motives, but must be determined by objective standards” (GS, §51). *Humanae Vitae* sees the unitive and procreative dimensions of conjugal love as those “objective standards” and calls them “two essential dimensions of the conjugal act” (HV, §12). What *Humanae Vitae* does that *Gaudium et Spes* does not, is to draw out the moral implications contained in the ontology of the person and of love presented in *Gaudium et Spes*.³³ Where is the step backward that Lawler regrets? If we have understood Lawler correctly, his judgment that *Humanae Vitae* reinstates a previously overcome, inadequate model of marriage, is simply a fundamental disagreement between his own understanding of experience and love and that of the Council. *Humanae Vitae* therefore brings to light this fundamental misinterpretation of the Council. Lawler’s anthropology rests on a presumption that offspring, faithfulness, indissolubility, and sacramentality are ultimately extrinsic to the very experience of conjugal love. Let us now look at an elaboration of an anthropology that seeks to take into account those factors.

The Discovery of the Self

While the reigning confusion about the meaning of experience should warn us to be cautious, the term nevertheless remains indispensable when the meaning of person and of love is at stake.³⁴ Man discovers through experience who he is.³⁵ Given the purpose of this essay, we will limit

³³ This is further proved by the speech of Paul VI to the Equipes of Notre-Dame in 1970 and by John Paul II’s work on theology of the body. Lawler does not provide any sustained engagement with John Paul’s theology of the body, which is an important missing element in his treatment of marriage.

³⁴ See, e.g., Karol Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, trans. Andrzej Ptocki (Boston: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1979); Giovanni Paolo II, *Uomo e donna lo credè. Catechesi sull’amore umano* (Rome: Città Nuova, 2001), 5–24.

³⁵ As recent moral theologians have demonstrated, every moral experience regards not only the “what” but, intrinsically connected to this, the “who am I?” See, for example, Servais Pinckaers, O.P., *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, trans. Sr. Mary Thomas Noble (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1995); 48–50; Livio Melina, José Noriega, and Juan José Pérez-Soba, *Una luz para el obrar. Experiencia moral, caridad y acción cristiana* (Madrid: Palabra, 2006), 29–67, 84–98.

ourselves to a few considerations on the meaning of human experience, following J. Mouroux's work, in order to offer an alternative reading to Lawler's and to ground an adequate understanding of fecundity.³⁶

Mouroux seeks to show that "experience" is the person's incarnate, affective awareness of his historical and dramatic relation with the antecedent, symbolic, and non-intrusive self-manifestation of being's truth through reality. "Experience" refers then to man's totalizing and lived encounter and relation with the one who alone is, the one who is the divine mystery. This encounter has its beginning with God and not with man—who finds himself always already in relation with the mystery—and is always a mediated one: either through the symbolic richness of reality, or the presence of a witness—the other seen as a sacrament of God.³⁷ The sense of immediacy frequently ascribed to experience refers to the person's being freely engaged in this encounter, not to a gnostic "direct presence."³⁸ Despite its indispensable relevance, it is crucial to acknowledge that experience is not the final, all-encompassing horizon. Experience presupposes but does not encompass either the person's life or the divine mystery—and the latter in a twofold sense: experience is unable to exhaust God and incapable of grasping God in

³⁶ Jean Mouroux (1901–1973) reflected deeply on Aquinas and was also in dialogue with other significant French theologians, including de Lubac, Danielou, Blondel, and Rousselot. On the topic of experience, his was a lone positive voice between the Modernist Crisis and the Second Vatican Council. It did, however, open up a path for reflection that many have followed. See, among others, Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, vol. 1, *Seeing the Form*, trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1983); Joseph Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology: Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology*, trans. Sr. Mary Francis McCarthy (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987), 343–55; Luigi Giussani, *The Risk of Education: Discovering Our Ultimate Destiny*, trans. Rosanna Giammanco Frongia (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2001), 98–102. For the present purpose I would like to mention these works by Mouroux: *Sens chrétien de l'homme* (Paris: Aubier, 1945); idem, *Je crois en Toi. Structure personnelle de la foi* (1949; Paris: Du Cerf, 1966) (English translation: Jean Mouroux, *I Believe: The Personal Structure of Faith* [New York: Sheed and Ward, 1959]); idem, *L'expérience chrétienne. Introduction à une théologie* (Paris: Aubier, 1952) (English translation: Jean Mouroux, *The Christian Experience: An Introduction to Theology*, trans. George Lamb [New York: Sheed and Ward, 1954]); and idem, *Le mystère du Temps* (Paris: Aubier, 1962).

³⁷ For faith as knowledge by way of a witness see, e.g., Augustine, *De fide rerum quae non videntur* (PL, 40); *Le témoignage*, ed. Enrico Castelli (Paris: Aubier, 1972).

³⁸ Even the immediacy proper to mystical experience is not lacking in a sense of mediation. Since God is Triune, one "sees" the Father in the Son through the Holy Spirit. To advocate an absolute lack of mediation would entail a rejection of Trinitarian theology and of metaphysics.

himself.³⁹ Since it is inexplicable without its relation to God, human experience is always religious experience.

Experience exists so that man, who is a communal being, might grow as a person by living his constitutive relation with God. Experience, then, is essentially dynamic and historical. The encounter with God by way of a historical witness that happens gratuitously, and which in a sense is always already taking place, bespeaks a relation whose fulfillment is prophetically present in the historical circumstances but whose final form cannot be deduced from those circumstances or from man's own desires. This dynamic movement that characterizes human experience, however, does not mean that historical development determines human nature. Rather, on the one hand, man is born, is given to himself, is a self from the beginning, and has the task to be and become himself.⁴⁰ On the other hand, as his own sexed bodiliness witnesses, this task is undertaken always within his being-given and cannot be completed by his own means. Human experience, then, refers to the growing awareness of a path originated by the encounter with Another through a witness, a path whose goal is the personalization of the human being.⁴¹ Given that Christian experience is the unexpected fulfillment of human and religious experience in the divine mystery made present in Christ—that sacrament of the Father in whose light one is able to read and understand every other experience—in theological terms we could say that growth into humanity is both the indwelling of the Trinity in the believer and the participation in the communion of saints, a participation which makes of the human person a truly *anima ecclesiastica*.

The depersonalization of experience, that is, the contraction of experience to its objective or subjective pole, rather than seeing it as the lived encounter in which two subjects know each other, is its most drastic reduction.⁴² According to Moroux, the empiricist and idealist interpretations are the two common forms this reduction takes. Whereas the idealist reading considers experience a sheer construct of the subject, the empiricist sees experience as what is simply lived out by a passive subject who does not critically assess what happens to him. On this reading, simple, direct contact guarantees knowledge, as though the living out of

³⁹ Mouroux, *L'expérience chrétienne*, 369. This second incapability also secures man's impossibility of knowing that he is in a state of grace.

⁴⁰ Mouroux, *L'expérience chrétienne*, 19–24; Giussani, *The Risk of Education*, 98–99.

⁴¹ See Mouroux, *Je crois en Toi*.

⁴² In this regard the subjectivistic, emotivistic, and idealistic reductions of experience are ultimately a rejection of the dialogical nature of the person that is itself in relation with another. See Mouroux, *L'expérience chrétienne*, 19.

something were identical with awareness of its meaning.⁴³ Emotions, feelings, and whatever else one undergoes become the essential content of human experience. In a manner consistent with this reading, Lawler and other contemporary theologians characterize the Magisterium's theological method as an artificial deduction and imposition of ethical norms from a priori ethical principles or abstract metaphysical reflections, without taking into serious account the real and lived experience of actual men and women. The Church, it is claimed, tends to offer a limited and self-referential theology that is unwilling to listen to the voices of concrete individuals because it fears having to change its position on, for example, contraception, divorce, or homosexuality. Lawler says that by not paying attention to human experience, the Church ends up either blocking doctrinal development or elaborating ethical norms that are unreal and incoherent. The Church, he claims, has always defended marriage's indissolubility but, *de facto*, has rarely followed her own understanding.⁴⁴

⁴³ In this light, many contemporary theologians believe that lived married experience grants their theoretical reflection an a priori authority over that of consecrated people. This claim, however, misunderstands the nature of love and the structure of experience. Experience of conjugal love does not coincide with lived conjugal love. The former is the historical, growing, affective awareness of the origin, meaning, depth, and telos of the latter (in this regard experience cannot be identified with a knowledge by connaturality either). To identify conjugal love with the experience of it amounts to imposing on love a logos that is extrinsic to it and hence unable to give itself through the experience of love. It is not a coincidence that, e.g., Lawler's critique of *Humanae Vitae* disregards the encyclical's numerous references to the "concrete" experience of love. Furthermore, the dichotomy that these authors baldly presume between married and consecrated life is rooted in a reductive understanding of virginity as lack of sexual activity and in an identification of virginity with life of singlehood. If virginity is the eschatological anticipation of the way eros and agape come together in God's love, an anticipation offered to man by the Crucified Risen Christ, then conjugal love finds its truth and not its negating opposite in it. These theological reflections on marriage tend to conceive the conjugal and virginal states of life apart from the logos of agape brought by Christ, whose contribution to man's experience of love is therefore reduced to a moral enhancement. The incapacity to see the integral relation between virginity and married life and the existence of both in Christ's form of love leads ultimately to marriage's loss of any horizon able to transcend and hence embrace and enlarge the married experience of love. See Lawler, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 201–15; Lisa S. Cahill, "Marriage: Developments in Catholic Theology and Ethics," *Theological Studies* 64 (2003): 78–105; Kenneth R. Himes and James A. Coriden, "The Indissolubility of Marriage: Reasons to Reconsider," *Theological Studies* 65 (2004): 453–99; Stephen Pope, "The Magisterium's Arguments Against 'Same-Sex-Marriage': An Ethical Analysis and Critique," *Theological Studies* 65 (2004): 530–65.

⁴⁴ Lawler, *What Is*, 144–53; Himes and Coriden, "The Indissolubility of Marriage," 498–99.

Although it is true that one “learns from experience,” it is important to realize that Lawler’s claim—that the experience of many married couples and how they live out their marriages should bring about a reconsideration of doctrine—is the conclusion of a deductive methodology based on an anthropology and a metaphysics that themselves contradict experience.⁴⁵ Conceiving God more as an a-personal, unfathomable mystery rather than a Trinitarian communion of persons, and hence consciously self-limiting the nature of experience, Lawler’s system postulates a notion of person as an androgynous singlehood that determines himself and his own bodiliness out of his free choices. To claim that the experience of conjugal love (as revealed by sociological research) is sufficient grounds for a reconception of doctrine is to introduce into the experience of married couples a concept of the person and his relation to God that does not respect what experience makes evident about either of them.⁴⁶

Looking now at the experience of love—which is not merely one of many experiences that the human being may have, but rather the privileged place given to man to discover himself and the meaning of the whole—will help us to see that the logos of *agape* gives itself to be known from within the experience of love, and cannot be imposed on it from the outside as one of many possible models. The experience of love is always an experience of creatureliness and hence it is called to enter into the logos that offers itself as *agape*. Participation in the logos of *agape*, as we will see in the next section, offers man the possibility of experiencing true fruitfulness. In this regard, the experience of evil—for instance,

⁴⁵ It is therefore insufficient to state, as Lawler does, that experience offers data and that meaning is mediated culturally. Meaning, which always has a cultural dimension, is offered to the human person from within experience itself and, although it is greater than one’s experience, it is not extrinsic to it.

⁴⁶ Mouroux cogently shows that experience has three meanings: empirical, experimental, and existential. The first refers to what happens to man, what he perceives through sense knowledge. The second refers instead to the measurable data upon which science is built. In his summary of Mouroux’s concept of experience, J. Ratzinger comments that whereas empirical experience refers to the Aristotelian and Thomistic “*nihil in intellectu nisi in sensu*,” the experiential refers to the Platonic “*nihil in sensu nisi per intellectum*.” Ratzinger follows W. Beinert in explaining “experiential” as “existential” experience. See Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology*, 346–50. Yet if life is greater than experience, and life shows that the human being is a person inasmuch as he lives his relation with God through concrete historical circumstances, then the previous two levels are subsumed in and ordered to the “experiential” or existential level. Experience, Mouroux claims, must be taken in all its personal totality; and this totality includes having being created by a Triune God who is Love.

the case of abusive parents—and its consequent theological and anthropological distortions of the meaning and experience of love, can indeed impede an adequate interpretation of one's own experience. Yet these are distortions of what things are. Things as such can be understood only in light of a proper ontology and anthropology. The reduction of the experience of love to the empiricist-experimental level, and the relegation of the "experiential" level to culturally determined extrinsic models, do not do justice to experience because they prevent the logos borne by experience itself from speaking. My claim, however, is that to understand the experience of married love, one must see it within the form of love experienced by the child with his or her parents. The natural relation between childhood and marriage will help us to see the relation between natural and sacramental love and the relation between baptism and the sacrament of marriage.

The initial experience of human love, first of all, indicates that love itself precedes and enables one's encounter with it. A child is conceived in love: within that love he begins to be aware of his own difference with respect to those to whom it has been given to exist, as it has been given to himself to exist. The wonderful recognition of one's own having been invited to exist, as John Paul II beautifully explains, is awakened through man's own nuptial body, the sacrament of his very person, in his encounter with the other.⁴⁷ Love not only awakens the self through the nuptial body, but also entrusts this wonderful recognition to the parents' and the child's freedom. It is only, as Ferdinand Ulrich says, if the

father and mother enter a priori into the modesty of the finite, that the child may experience them *positively* as parents in the first place. The child can receive himself from his parents as a "gift to himself," his existence can be something that is thanked for, only through their Yes to the difference, which can never be closed, between the finite origin that they are and the infinite origin.⁴⁸

If the parents accept that difference, then the child's encounter with love through the maternal embrace will reveal not only that love (and life) is beautiful (it gives itself to be seen), good (it gives itself) and true (it does not deceive). It also makes the child aware that his gratitude is finally to

⁴⁷ John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them*, 13:1. See also Adrian J. Walker, "On 'Rephilosophizing' Theology," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 31 (2004): 143–67.

⁴⁸ Ferdinand Ulrich, *Der Mensch als Anfang. Zur philosophischen Anthropologie der Kindheit* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1970), 77–78.

be offered to the ultimate paternal Source from which he comes.⁴⁹ This encounter with love allows the child to discover that his very self exists always already only within love, and that all his creativity will be an expression of his having been handed into existence. Experience witnesses that the human person is a gift whose free participation in the gratuitous and paternal source makes the person be.

The encounter with Love that precedes and offers itself to the freedom of the child, but without determining its answer, contains within itself the promise that what is given will remain and grow. What is given, however, is not some-thing but a communion with someone. The encounter with love reveals not only that a person comes from someone, and *is* this dialogue with the Source in and through the witness, but that love is a communion of persons. As experienced in childhood, the presence of the other—in this case the parents—is not a threat to an abstract independence but the promise of communion.⁵⁰ The encounter with the beloved contains the same prophecy.

Experience is not only the continuous introduction into a love that is always greater. The promise of communion also brings to light another element that is crucial for understanding the awareness proper to experience: a true experience of love, and hence every experience, is always an experience of conversion. Such conversion is not a breakthrough to power, as E. Johnson would contend, but rather a renunciation of one's own self-will for the sake of the other.⁵¹ Experience teaches that the true form of love is one in which the affirmation of oneself is given in terms of an affirmation of the other as the meaning of one's own existence. The surrender, therefore, is a true death to the egotistic self that seeks to impose its own little measure on love—even if the beloved agrees with this measure. Ultimately this surrender is to Love itself, a conversion to the Origin with and through the witness. If the ultimate horizon of experience were not Love itself, the surrender to another would alienate the self. At the same time, if it were not through and with a witness, history and the cosmos would be meaningless.

⁴⁹ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, vol. 5, *The Realm of Metaphysics in the Modern Age*, trans. Oliver Davies et al. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991), 613–27.

⁵⁰ Livio Melina, José Noriega, and Juan José Pérez-Soba, *La plenitud del obrar cristiano: dinámica de la acción y perspectiva teológica de la moral* (Madrid: Palabra, 2001), 345–77.

⁵¹ Elizabeth Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad, 2005), 61–67.

The experience of love bears within itself both the mark of childhood and that of the Cross. The former indicates that the person has received everything as a gift, himself first and foremost. This having received himself releases the child into a spontaneous self transcendence. In this way he imitates the love that has generated him and gradually discovers that the mark of the Cross is integral to the gift of self. As revealed in Christ, and as human experience intuits, this giving of oneself for the other's sake has Love itself as its adequate measure. The experience of the filial form of love—that is, human love as authentically existing within the preceding divine love, in the movement of conversion toward its permanent source, through the acceptance and abandoning of oneself to the promise of communion and fruitfulness that the encounter with the other person conveys—remains at the core of married love (Gn 2:24). Bearing in mind this filial nature of the experience of love, we can now ponder the meaning of marriage's fruitfulness.

The Child's Fatherhood

Lawler seems to perceive spousal friendship as the end of marriage itself. In so doing, he overlooks the reality that, as Alain Mattheeuws acutely lifts out of *Gaudium et Spes*, conjugal love—which is sacramentally and ecclesially immersed in God's love for the Church in Christ—constitutes the *essence* of marriage. The love of the spouses is not its own end.⁵² The experience of conjugal love witnesses that it comes from Another and has this Other as its *telos*. To conceive marriage in terms of conjugal love allows us to approach the question of its fruitfulness from the point of view of the vocation to and mission of love that finds its *telos*, and hence its truth, in sacramental married love.⁵³ Thus, as we shall see, fruitfulness regards both the growth of the persons of the spouses in their entrusting one another to the complete form of their married love, and the exuberant fruit of the conjugal bond, the child. This is true, however, inasmuch as these two elements are rooted in the Paternal source through Christ in the Spirit, and are at the service of Triune Love. This framework is able to preserve and deepen the content of the Thomistic and Augustinian accounts of the ends and goods of marriage. For the sake of clarity I would like to approach the concept of married fruitfulness in four points. These reflections attempt to draw on the Christological, Trinitarian, sacramental, and

⁵² Mattheeuws, *Union et procréation*, 239.

⁵³ The sacrament of marriage is married love in its truth, not a spiritual enhancement. What is intuited in the human experience of love (which is always in relation to God, as we saw in the preceding section) reaches its truth here.

ecclesial illumination of marriage proposed by *Gaudium et Spes*, which Lawler's theology of marriage, I believe, would benefit from engaging.⁵⁴

1. Sacramental married love is fruitful and lives out its vocation to parenthood responsibly if it acknowledges that its form is filial; that is to say, if the spouses recognize that the source and end of conjugal love is not simply the will of the spouses but, in them and through them, the God who has revealed himself in Christ as Love (*HV*, §8).⁵⁵ The first meaning of fruitfulness is then the recognition that married love is itself the fruit of the interaction between God's love and the spouses' love. Fruitfulness in *sensu stricto* occurs within this encompassing event. The vows that the spouses make at the ceremony grow out of a generative past that is not limited only to the directly preceding time of courtship and engagement. The sacrament of marriage, as has frequently been discussed, has its roots in baptism. The spouses were created in Christ's image so that at a certain moment in history, they could find their place in existence in Christ's "place," that is, in his relation of love with the Father in the Holy Spirit. Baptism then is not simply the *conditio sine qua non* for a valid sacramental wedding. It is the defining moment of the person who receives it because it incorporates him into Christ and his body, and it is precisely that to which every man is called.⁵⁶ Baptism is the incorporation into Christ and his body, the Church, which opens the person up to communion while also making him disposed toward it; he is no longer under the sway of the claim of autosoterism. Man, who has brought division and segregation upon himself (as de Lubac has shown), is retrieved by Christ from the hellish solitude that is marked by fear that the Father is the deceiver, and is re-grafted into that communion for which he was made.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ As mentioned earlier, Lawler's sacramental theology does not include these dimensions of marriage, which are made explicit by GS. This framework suggests reading conjugal love in terms of gift, and thus is able to retrieve causality and teleology within sacramental married love. Alain Mattheeuws, among others, has pursued this road in his *Les 'dons' du mariage. Recherche de théologie morale et sacramentale* (Paris: Culture et vérité, 1996).

⁵⁵ "Authentic married love," says GS §48, "is caught up into divine love and is governed and enriched by Christ's redeeming power and the saving activity of the Church, so that this love may lead the spouses to God with powerful effect and may aid and strengthen them in sublime office of being a father or a mother."

⁵⁶ In this sense, it is not coincidental that Paul VI in his *Ecclesiam Suam* placed a tremendous insistence on the Church's need to help Christians acknowledge and deepen the truth of their baptism.

⁵⁷ Henri de Lubac, *Catholicism: Christ and the Common Destiny of Man*, trans. Lancelot C. Sheppard and Sr. Elizabeth Englund (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988).

This insertion into and opening up to communion reveals its form within man's specific vocation. Marriage is the form that the call to communion of some baptized Christians takes; it is, in this sense, the flourishing of the form of love given in baptism. As created in Christ, man is in a certain sense also created for friendship, thanks to the Spirit, the Person-Communion, as John Paul II suggests.⁵⁸ The Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, guides the spouses from within that they might know one other, fall in love, and grow in that love until they are given the freedom to say a total yes to each other in Christ.⁵⁹ The fact that marriage takes place in the Church before a witness is the lovers' discrete and clear acknowledgment that the ultimate origin of their love is Christ, the sacrament of the Father, and not themselves. Being married in Christ is the offering to him of the gift received, a deeper participation in his love for them through their mutual love. It is a free and gratuitous act of expropriation that follows the nature of love, which, as we saw, has within it the form of childhood and of the Cross. This expropriation is, at the same time, the beginning of the fulfillment of the promise of communion. Christ receives the offering of their love and makes it part of his love for the Church and the Father. The Father, in response to his Son's love, sends the Spirit to the spouses so that they can both be and live an indissoluble communion whose form, like the Son's love for the Church, is Eucharistic: thankfulness and the gift of oneself to the end. The Spirit of Christ, the person-communion, is the one who makes the bond, the communion of love of the spouses, sacramentally indissoluble.⁶⁰ Marriage becomes and remains a sacrament, which means that "Christ abides with them thereafter 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" (GS, §48). This act of faith, which the Father rewards with the Spirit of Christ, allows the spouses to experience their sacramental bond itself as a God-given fruitfulness.⁶¹ This fruitfulness is the fertile ground in which children, when they are given, are

⁵⁸ John Paul II, *Dominum et Vivificantem*, §34.

⁵⁹ The numerous forms of this are determined by the Spirit himself. For a reflection on the role of the Holy Spirit in marriage, see *Il matrimonio in Cristo è matrimonio nello Spirito*, ed. Renzo Bonetti (Rome: Città Nuova, 1998).

⁶⁰ See Ouellet, *Divine Likeness*, 79–101.

⁶¹ For a deeper reflection on faith as the encounter with a presence, see, among others, Mouroux, *Je crois en Toi*; Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*; Luigi Giussani, *The Journey to Truth Is an Experience*, trans. John Zucchi (Montreal: McGill-Queens, 2006).

received. This mutual self-gift, the self-transcendence that characterizes the spouses' love, is not, however, an end in itself. Human love, through Christ in the Spirit, is caught up in divine love so that "this love may lead the spouses to God" (GS, §48). The filiality of spousal love does not mean only that it has its source in the Father's love, it also means that conjugal love is part of the movement of return to the Father. Conjugal love is transcendent both in its origin and its *telos*. Earlier we indicated that every true experience of love is an experience of conversion. Now we can see that the total reception of the human beloved for life is authentically human only if it lets go of the voluntaristic hubris that looks to do only what is "humanly feasible," and lets itself be embraced instead by the reckless, divine measure of love. Without this eschatological perspective, spousal love and its fruitfulness remain incoherent. We will return to this again at the end.

2. The fruitfulness of filial conjugal love consists also in representing the Father. We saw that conjugal love is a communion of life and love because it participates in God's love. Divine love, in fact, cannot but generate a form of love that is similar to its own: communion. In this regard, conjugal love represents the Father in that it makes evident to human experience the fact that it does not come from itself; that is, it is always being begotten (sacramentally).⁶² Its being itself gift is, at the same time, an icon of its source. Furthermore, conjugal love represents the Father because, analogically to God's, conjugal love has an inextricable order. Without affirming any sort of subordinationism, it is possible to affirm the irreplaceable position the Father—who gives all of himself in begetting the Son, without ceasing to be himself—holds for the divine communion of persons. The well-known misinterpretations of the term "communion" have at their root the fear that the establishment of a beginning, a hierarchical principle, would entail the enslavement of the other members. This would indeed be the case, if hierarchy were taken to mean power in a worldly sense. Yet the Father as revealed in Christ is the one who gives all of himself: to the Son (and to the Spirit with the Son) the Father gives life in itself; to man, the Father gives participation in his life. The Father is the one whose gift of himself is that of making the

⁶² The meaning of evidence here presupposes an understanding of truth as self-disclosure that gives itself through a sign without pre-determining it, and that calls for man's free and rational response. See Angelo Bertuletti, "Sapere e libertà," in *L'evidenza e la fede*, ed. Giuseppe Colombo (Milan: Glossa, 1988), 444–65.

other be.⁶³ If authority, as its Latin root indicates, is to make someone grow, a father fulfills his task not only by begetting a child, but by exalting the one whom he begets. It is thanks to the father's authority that the child can truly experience freedom.⁶⁴

That authority is indeed self-surrender, as Christ reveals of God the Father, does not mean that a father's position of authority within the family is lost in his self-sacrifice. If this were the case, his gift of self would not be a true surrender but rather a rejection of the *logos* of love. The absence of fatherhood always entails the disintegration of communion and hence the loss of identity. Furthermore, the absence of the father who surrenders himself (while remaining father) that the other might be also prevents the development of freedom and makes it almost impossible to avoid the decline of conjugal friendship into an egotistic affirmation of self.

While both spouses are creatures, and as such, both take their form of existence from the Son—thankfulness, acceptance, and gratuitous response—within conjugal love it is the husband who also represents the Father.⁶⁵ This mission is utterly disproportionate to man's efforts. "In love and in fidelity," Balthasar says, "the woman has

⁶³ While for obvious reasons we cannot develop this point here, it is important to say that this understanding of the divine processions in terms of gift does not eliminate the absolute equality of the divine persons. The Father possesses the divine essence only as given and the Son as received and reciprocated in gratuitous response. See Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Logic: Theological Logical Theory*, vol. 2, *Truth of God*, trans. Adrian J. Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 123–70. I dealt with this issue in my "Eternal Happening: God as an Event of Love," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 32 (2005): 214–45.

⁶⁴ Irenaeus's famous statement, "Gloria Dei vivens homo," as Orbe explains, indicates that "contrary to other ideologies, God seeks to glorify the human being divinely in everything. God wants to throw himself in the human being; that he be clarified with God's own clarity." Antonio Orbe, "Gloria Dei vivens homo (Análisis de Ireneo, *adv. haer.* IV, 20, 1–7)," *Gregorianum* 73 (1993): 263.

⁶⁵ An adequate understanding of this requires viewing conjugal love and the family as one reality. In addition, it must also attend to the asymmetry of the dual unity of male and female. Interpreting Genesis 2:23, Balthasar explains that "the word that calls out only attains fulfillment when it is understood, accepted and given back as a word. This clearly shows us the way in which man can be primary and woman secondary, where the primary remains unfulfilled without the secondary. The primary needs a partner of equal rank and dignity for its own fulfillment. . . . The woman, who is both 'answer' and 'face,' is not only man's delight: she is the help, the security, the home man needs; she is the vessel of fulfillment specially designed for him. Nor is she simply the vessel of his fruitfulness: she is equipped with her own explicit fruitfulness. Yet her fruitfulness is not a primary fruitfulness: it is an answering fruitfulness" (Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*,

an easier time of it. . . . The woman is not called upon to represent anything that she herself is not, while the man has to represent the very source of life, which he can never be.”⁶⁶ The fact that the human father cannot be the very source of life is precisely what calls him to be most transparent to the Paternal source that gratuitously allows him to communicate life. This representation of the Father has little to do with the human father’s precarious good intentions or his moral coherence. The capacity of the human father to represent the origin is mediated to him by Christ. In Christ, the husband’s gift of himself acquires its truth; the memory of the origin, the Father, is both ontological-sacramental and existential. For human love to be caught up in divine love means too that the husband’s love for his spouse, in being like Christ’s for the Church (Eph 5:25–27), becomes more transparent to what it is called to be. In this regard, human fatherhood is not simply a “role” that can be exchanged. The wife cannot be herself, that is, the icon of divine gratitude and creaturely, fruitful reception of divine love (Gen 4:1), if the husband does not represent the paternal origin. At the same time, the husband’s generativity and authority are themselves elicited by the wife’s response to love’s presence. This circularity, which does not obviate the hierarchical order of conjugal love, shows that the husband’s gift of self is always already a response to an antecedent love.⁶⁷ Only asymmetry between husband and wife, as the experience of conjugal love witnesses, respects equality—that is, being created in the Son’s perfect human response to the Father on the Cross who gives all of himself for man’s salvation.

3. As filial, conjugal love is fruitful because it has been given the possibility of a further giving and the generation of a person. Created in the image of God the giver, the communion of life and love is offered the capacity to give superabundantly, i.e., to conceive another. Fruitfulness, a crucial term in Scripture, is always a *superabundant* fulfillment.⁶⁸ The

vol. 3, *The Dramatis Personae: The Person in Christ*, trans. Graham Harrison [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992], 284–85).

⁶⁶ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *New Elucidations*, trans. Sr. Mary Theresilde Skerry (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 221. It is important not to draw a direct and unilateral relation between the persons of the Trinity and each member of the family.

⁶⁷ Karol Wojtyła, “Radiation of Fatherhood,” in idem, *The Collected Plays and Writings on Theater*, trans. Boleslaw Taborski (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 333–64.

⁶⁸ It suffices here to recall that Christ transforms 180 gallons of water into wine (Jn 2:9), that twelve baskets of bread remain after having fed thousands (Mt 14:20), and that Christ washes the disciples’ feet (Jn 13:5–10).

fruitfulness that man desires, and which he often confuses with the fulfillment of expectations, is not simply the successful accomplishment of great deeds, but more importantly, the begetting of someone—whether a child or a people.

Human love arrives at its truth when it is allowed to enter sacramentally into the absolute measurelessness of divine love. In their gift to each other—a gift that, as experience witnesses, is constitutive of their very being and of their marriage—the parents thus participate in a fruitfulness that, like their bond, is greater than they are. The fruit of marriage is “excessive,” first of all, because it comes from the spouses’ communion of life and love. The child is conceived only with and through another—who is truly other only if sexually different. Fruitfulness is not a gift that the spouses have in storage to exchange when they deem it appropriate. It is a dimension of the communion they have been allowed to form and is therefore not simply the outcome of an act of two individuals. This is also why the child always incarnates their unity in a new way.⁶⁹ When calculation is introduced, when the parents seek to determine the form and the content of the fruitfulness of their God-given communion, they claim the Father’s place for themselves. In so doing, they limit their love and thus break its fruitful unity asunder. The child, when he comes to be within this fragmentation, is introduced into his own identity and into the family only as a replica of a poverty that has little to do with divine exuberance. Fruitfulness, therefore, is fulfillment, not as “meeting the need” or the desire of the spouses, but as over-fulfillment. The mutual indwelling proper to spousal love contains within itself the fruitfulness proper to God, that is, the capacity to generate, with God’s help, another person.

After several decades of IVF and various other recent biotechnological achievements, contemporary man has come to think of procreation technologically. Within this mindset, the child is seen as something the parents have the right to receive, and, when advisable and feasible, also the right to modify in order to offer the child a life of as little suffering as possible.⁷⁰ The child, however, is not just

⁶⁹ Today this is no longer obvious. Androgynous anthropology conceives fruitfulness solipsistically by denying the meaning of sexual difference or interpreting it in terms of symmetrical complementarity. See David C. Crawford, “Liberal Androgyny: ‘Gay Marriage’ and the Meaning of Sexuality in Our Time,” *Communio: International Catholic Review* 33 (2006): 239–65.

⁷⁰ In this sense, Gregory Stock comments: “IVF still accounts for fewer than 1 percent of live births in the United States. Improvements, however, may transform the procedure enough to integrate it into routine procreation. With a little marketing by IVF clinics, traditional reproduction may begin to seem antiquated,

another subject of the human species, the obvious outcome of a fecund bodily union. It is a gift, a completely new being, given to itself with its own singular destiny to meet and mission to live. The fruit of marriage, in this second sense, is excessive because the child is a third, another person. The child's first smile and his communication through language are just two moments that reveal that the child is not something but someone, a spiritual human being.⁷¹ Like the Logos, the child is never a repetition of the parents, no matter how much the child may take after them. As the only-begotten Son of the Father shows us, the closer to the source, the more perfectly new is one's re-living of the origin. What this means is that the more closely the spouses live out the relation to the source of their love, the more truly personal and fruitful their love will become. It is only distance from the origin that results in dreary monotony and "elderliness."⁷²

Married fruitfulness, as it is given to the eyes of faith to see, is a participation in Christ's fruitfulness on the cross.⁷³ Christ's Eucharistic self-surrender on the cross is absolutely unreserved, and so is able to introduce a new fruitfulness into history. Christ's virginal fecundity introduces a new meaning of bodily human generation, while, at the same time, it is the way in which God the Father blesses the couple. This blessing could be one of offspring, but it could also be one of the sacrifice of not being able to have children. Conjugal love participates in the form of the cross and sometimes this means

if not downright irresponsible. One day, people may view sex as essentially recreational, and conception as something best done in the laboratory" (Gregory Stock, *Redesigning Humans: Our Inevitable Genetic Future* [New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2002], 55). See Joseph Ratzinger, "Man between Reproduction and Creation: Theological Questions on the Origin of Human Life," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 16 (1989): 197–211.

⁷¹ I dealt with this in my *Spirit's Gift: The Metaphysical Insight of Claude Bruaire* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University Press, 2006), 83–113.

⁷² Meister Eckhart wrote that "Novitas est propria principio, vetustas autem omnis est separatio et distantia ab eodem; veterascit ergo omne recedens et elongatum a principio, renovatur autem et innovatur accedendo et redeundo ad principium" (Meister Eckhart, *Exp in Sap.*, in *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Âge*, IV, 264; cited in Vladimir Lossky, *Théologie négative et connaissance de Dieu chez Maître Eckhart* [Paris: J. Vrin, 1960], 366). If, as we mentioned, the parents accept their own difference from the divine source in their acknowledgment that they have been sacramentally introduced into divine love, they will allow their children to be themselves in their relation to their (paternal and divine) origin. The implications of the loss (or distortion) of fatherhood for the formation of the child are enormous.

⁷³ See Aquinas, *Super Sent.* IV, d. 26, q. 2, a. 1, ad 3.

embracing not only the sacrifice of an ongoing surrender—to one another, to one's own family, and to the Father—but also that of being unable to beget. If the spouses, then, embrace this sacrifice as a participation in the sufferings of Christ, the fecundity proper to marriage, which we discussed above, is transfigured. Christ's Eucharistic offer of himself for his bride, the Church, makes the sacrifice offered by the spouses spiritually fecund and, in a way that is frequently not given to them to perceive, it also makes the community grow. In this case, the fecundity of conjugal love, by means of the sacrifice, comes closer to Christ's supernatural fecundity. This brings us to our concluding point.

4. Conjugal love lives its own given fecundity responsibly if it accepts being placed at the service of another. Christ's claim that there is no greater love than to give up one's life for one's friends (Jn 15:13) does not only reveal the measure of love. It also reveals that this gift of his life is not his own initiative. He, the one sent by the Father, accomplishes his work within the modality and time determined by the Father. He does what he sees the Father doing, and awaits patiently from him the fulfillment of his hour. In a similar way, the spouses, having been incorporated into Christ's love for the Church, are invited to put their married love at the service of Christ's mission through the Church. In this regard, responsible fruitfulness is either obedience to the form of love to the end as determined by Christ, or it is simply reproduction, a technical calculus. In Christ, however, God has brought love's ever-greater and truer measure to man. This obedience to love, as we mentioned earlier, is what secures the personal creativity of the spouses. The parents introduce the children to the truth of love only if they themselves accept their own sonship; that is, if they recognize and teach their children that reality is positive because the Father is good and all-giving, and that the Father's design for Christ "to be all in all" is the fulfillment of human existence. Taking responsibility for spousal fruitfulness is, first and foremost, a matter of allowing the Father's love to take effect within conjugal love. *Humanae Vitae's* clarification that every conjugal union is both unitive and procreative, then, is not a prohibition or a distortion of the experience of conjugal love, but rather a reminder that married love, as a true, sacramental participation in Christ's love for the Church, is an education toward the truth of love and love's fruitfulness. **N V**