

Conjugal Spirituality and the Gift of Reverence^{*}

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IN THE LAST homily of John Paul II's Catechesis on Human and Divine Love, no. 133, he makes it clear that Paul VI's encyclical *Humanae Vitae* provided the impetus for the composition of these reflections. "In some sense, one can say that all the reflections dealing in the "Redemption of the Body and the Sacramentality of Marriage" seem to constitute an *extended commentary* on the doctrine contained precisely in *Humanae Vitae*."¹ He goes on to say that "the reaction the encyclical stirred up confirms the importance and difficulty of these questions."² Yet John Paul II finds much more in the controversial encyclical beyond defending it from its critics and reaffirming the soundness of its teaching on responsible parenthood. Besides seizing the occasion for a renewal of a Trinitarian anthropology of man³ from Paul VI's emphasis on an "integral vision of man," he sees in it "the main lines of the *Christian spirituality of the conjugal*

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¹ John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, trans. Michael Waldstein (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 2006), November 28, 1984, 133, no. 2. Again in the very last paragraph: "The most important aspect seems to be the essential aspect that, in the whole of the reflections carried out, one can specify as follows: to face the questions raised by *Humanae Vitae* above all in theology, to formulate these questions and to look for an answer to them." These questions include the "difficult questions of our contemporary world concerning marriage and procreation." *Ibid.*, no. 4.

² *Ibid.*, no. 2

³ Throughout this essay, unless otherwise specified, the meaning of "man" should be understood to be "human."

life and vocation, and likewise that of *parents and the family*.”⁴ This is precisely because *Humanae Vitae* (no. 25) speaks of the couples’ consecration “for the carrying out of their proper vocation even to perfection.”⁵

Conjugal spirituality, for those familiar with the discussion of the papal Birth Control Commission, convened by Pope Paul VI to consider the licitness of the “pill,” is far from a side issue. Who could forget that a prominent Catholic spirituality movement, the Christian Family Movement (CFM), played a major role in the majority report of the Commission, which recommended that the Church change its 2000-year-old ban on contraception. Over and above the dissenting voices of the moral theologians, it was the worldwide survey of CFM couples instigated by Pat and Patty Crowley that is said to have tipped the balance. Married couples, it was argued, are the ones affected, and they gave the testimony of experience that the Church’s teaching was outmoded and, even in some cases, impossible.⁶ It is noteworthy that John Paul II, in response to this challenge, did not shy away from the testimony of experience but embraced it and made it a centerpiece of his analysis of the Genesis text.⁷

One can see, then, that although the section on conjugal spirituality comes right at the end of the Catechesis, it is by no means an afterthought. John Paul II takes as his cue Paul VI’s reference to the Lord’s entrusting to couples “the task of making visible to men the holiness and sweetness of the law, which unites the mutual love of husband and wife with their cooperation with the love of God the author of human life

⁴ Ibid., October 3, 1984, 126, no. 2.

⁵ Ibid., no. 1.

⁶ A full report of their part in the Papal Birth Control Commission can be found in Robert McClory, *Turning Point: The Inside Story of the Papal Birth Control Commission, and How Humanae Vitae Changed the Life of Patty Crowley and the Future of the Church* (New York: Crossroad, 1995). One respondent is quoted as summing up for all: “The statements on this subject must come from those who live in the situation on a daily basis. Second hand knowledge is not adequate to serve as the foundation upon which this important area can be discussed” (94). The data of the survey was later reanalyzed and it was found that, in fact, 64 percent of the couples stated that Rhythm (an earlier and imprecise method of periodic continence) was in some way helpful to their marriage. For some it brought an increased spiritual awareness, and greater discipline and self-mastery from the prayer and sacrifice involved; these findings were completely overlooked at the time. Richard J. Fehring and Elizabeth McGraw, “Spiritual Responses to the Regulation of Births (A Historical Comparison),” in *Life and Learning XII: Proceedings of the Twelfth University Faculty for Life Conference*, 2002, ed. Joseph W. Koterski (Washington, DC: University Faculty for Life, 2003): 265–83.

⁷ John Paul II, *Man and Woman*, September 26, 1979, 4, no. 5. See especially fn. 8.

(*HV* no. 25).⁸ His analysis of how they accomplish this task centers on the gift of piety. “The link of purity with love,” he says, “and the link of that same purity with piety as a gift of the Holy Spirit, is a little known thread in the theology of the body, but nevertheless deserves particularly deep study.”⁹

In the Wednesday Catechesis the leading scriptural texts for the pope’s reflection on piety are the Pauline texts on the human body as the “temple of the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor 6:19–20) and the need to “keep one’s body with holiness and reverence” (1 Thes 4:4). In a footnote, the pope notes that *eusebeia* or *pietas* in the Greco-Roman period generally applied to the veneration of the gods in terms of devotion, but it still kept its original and broader meaning of “reverence for the *vital* structures of life.” A wider meaning referred it to inter-human relations.¹⁰ Both are important in John Paul II’s interpretation of the Pauline texts in relation to *Humanae Vitae*.

According to Thomas Aquinas, piety is both a virtue and a gift of the Holy Spirit.¹¹ As a virtue it is linked to the cardinal virtue of justice. “The piety that pays duty and worship to a father in the flesh is a virtue but the piety that is a gift pays this to God as Father.”¹² Earlier he cites Romans 8:15: “You have received the spirit of adoption of sons, whereby we cry: ‘Abba (Father).’”¹³ Piety involves both duty and reverence: “‘duty’ referring to service, and ‘homage’ to reverence or honor.”¹⁴ John Paul II concurs with this understanding, preferring to emphasize the notion of reverence, particularly before the sacred. As such it appears 102 times in the Catechesis.¹⁵ It is that reverence for the holiness of God and the *vital structures of life* that John Paul II highlights in his presentation of piety and its relationship to love and conjugal spirituality.

⁸ Ibid., October 3, 1984, 126, no. 1.

⁹ Ibid., March 18, 1981, 57, no. 3.

¹⁰ Ibid., fn. 64.

¹¹ Thomas Aquinas treats of piety as a virtue in *Summa theologiae* II–II, q. 101 and as a gift of the Holy Spirit in II–II, q. 121. Michael Waldstein gives as the Pope’s definition of piety, that it is “the virtue that regulates one’s relation to one’s parents, fatherland, ancestors and other family members, and above all one’s relationship to God, where its proper act is reverence for the holiness of God.” He concludes that for John Paul II, “Among the gifts of the Holy Spirit, piety is the one most congenial to the virtue of sexual purity, because it is sensitive to the beauty and sacredness of the body as temple of the Holy Spirit.” John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Made Them*, “Index of Words and Phrases,” 712.

¹² Aquinas, *ST* II–II, q. 121, a. 1, ad 1.

¹³ Ibid., 1, a.

¹⁴ Ibid., q. 101, 2 a.

¹⁵ *Man and Woman*, “Index of Words and Phrases,” 714.

In this article I shall begin by looking at the Holy Family, where the gift of piety or reverence as the core of conjugal spirituality is displayed in all its purity. I shall show how some contemporary scriptural exegesis has rediscovered the full meaning of Joseph's piety, when he is faced with Mary's pregnancy; this new view overturns other, inadequate interpretations. I propose that this interpretation sheds new light on Joseph's married life with Mary with implications for conjugal spirituality. I shall then consider what is meant by "justice towards the Creator" and its relationship to the gift of piety. Finally I shall examine the pope's own treatment of the gift of reverence in the homilies 126 through 132 and shall show its relevance to conjugal spirituality, which looks to the Holy Family as the model of the "domestic church."

The Holy Family as the Domestic Church

Pope John Paul II's Apostolic Exhortation on St. Joseph, *Redemptoris Custos*, is a short and comparatively neglected teaching on the husband of Mary and the father of Jesus.¹⁶ Yet it contains an astonishingly rich and vital reflection on the family as the "domestic church," especially St. Joseph's contribution to the Incarnation through his *fiat*, corresponding to Mary's *fiat* at the Annunciation. Together with the Fathers of the Church, John Paul II affirms that Joseph's marriage to Mary is the juridical basis of his fatherhood of Jesus. "While it is important," he says, "to profess the *virginal conception of Jesus*, it is no less important to uphold *Mary's marriage to Joseph*, because juridically Joseph's fatherhood depends on it" (RC, no. 7).¹⁷ Tradition, in the steps of St. Augustine, has accorded the Holy Family all the goods of marriage, *proles*, *fides*, and *sacramentum*, offspring, fidelity, and sacrament.¹⁸ The newness of John Paul II's reflection is to develop an understanding of the Holy Family as the model and source of meaning for all families in a way never before expressed in the Church. The pope points out that just as there is a married couple at the beginning of the Old Covenant, Adam and Eve, who unleashed evil on the world, so at the beginning of the New Covenant, which renews all things in Christ, there is a married couple and from them "holiness

¹⁶ John Paul II, *Redemptoris Custos: Apostolic Exhortation of the Supreme Pontiff on the Person and Mission of Saint Joseph in the Life of Christ and of the Church* (Boston: St. Paul Books & Media, 1989) In the text citations will be given as RC, and section number.

¹⁷ His fatherhood is particularly evident in the command of the angel to *name* Jesus. Not only does he name Jesus, but he gives him the lineage of David, all through his marriage to Mary.

¹⁸ *Sacramentum* in St. Augustine referred to an unbreakable sacred bond; not until the Middle Ages was marriage defined as one of the seven sacraments.

spreads all over the earth" (RC, no. 7). The Holy Family, whose innermost meaning is constituted by both human and divine love, is for that reason specified as the original "domestic church" (*ecclesia domestica*) in which every family ought to find itself reflected (RC, no. 7).¹⁹

John Paul II recalls how, in a preface to the Mass of the Blessed Virgin Mary, she is celebrated as "united to Joseph, the just man, by a bond of marital and virginal love" (RC, no. 20).²⁰ From this he concludes that the two kinds of love symbolized by the marriage of Mary and Joseph—virgin and spouse—together represent the mystery of the Church. Not only do they not contradict each other but one presupposes the other. They are two simultaneous ways of expressing God's one Covenant of love with humanity. Both are found par excellence in the Holy Family. Joseph's virginity was his *husband's* "gift of self" to Mary's mission of *virginal* motherhood. Just as a couple's consent forms the basis of sacramental marriage, so Joseph's and Mary's *fiat* to God and each other brought into being their marriage. While conjugal union, the total gift of self, consummates a sacramental marriage, something new entered history with the Incarnation, the total bodily gift of self to God in Christ. Joseph and Mary were uniquely called to this total bodily gift to God in Christ within their marriage. In every way apart from the conjugal act, theirs was a true marriage.

The Holy Family as a Communion of Persons

John Paul II particularly wants to emphasize the union of hearts of Mary and Joseph, ensuing from their mutual consent, in line with both St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas. Yet he goes further, seeing the marriage of Mary and Joseph as realizing in full "freedom" the "spousal gift of self" in a perfect communion of persons (RC, no. 7). It is in the Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* that the pope particularly develops the idea of the family as a communion of persons. "Its first task," he says there, "is to live with fidelity the reality of communion in a constant effort to develop an authentic community of persons."²¹

The pope had devoted much of his philosophical work before elevation to the papacy to articulating what he means by a communion of persons.²² For a communion of persons to come into being implies first and foremost

¹⁹ "Ideo sacra in familia primariam nempe apud hanc 'ecclesiam domesticam' referri et resplendere velut in speculo debent Christianae familiae cunctae."

²⁰ Footnote 31, p. 38.

²¹ John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio: The Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World*, Apostolic Exhortation, November 22, 1981, no. 18.

²² See especially Karol Wojtyła, "The Person: Subject and Community," "The Family as a Community of Persons," and "Parenthood as a Community of Persons,"

the existence of *persons*. The human being is not only, as in the Boethian definition, a rational animal, but an irreducible subject, an incommunicable person.²³ Incommunicability means that the person is *sui iuris*. No one can will for him, even God. What this means, he says in *Love and Responsibility*, is that a person must never be treated simply as an object. Being a person and subject must always take precedence in any union with another.²⁴

Man is not a self-enclosed entity. The call to communion with another is inscribed in his very nature as a spiritual being. Not only has he received his being from God so that he is always in relationship with Him, but he has need of communion with other human beings. It is the nature of a spiritual being to go out beyond itself. God himself as supreme spiritual being pours himself out to generate the Son, and their reciprocal self-giving love *is* the Holy Spirit.

As an image of God, Man also pours himself out to another. Unlike God, who pours himself out solely from fullness, man as a limited creature reaches out to another both out of desire to share his unique richness as well as to fill a lack in himself.²⁵ At a foundational level, Man (male) has an innate need to share the riches of his masculinity with the woman, and to be completed in turn by her gift of femininity. In creation, Adam and Eve were called to the closest communion possible, the one-flesh union of marriage. Original nakedness was a sign that, before sin, they could share in the most complete communion possible, spiritual, psychological, and physical. It is important, however, to see how John Paul II interprets the biblical text to emphasize the priority of the communion that belongs to Adam and Eve as *persons*, similar in their humanity, before even being aware of their difference of sex. (It must be emphasized, however, that sexual differentiation belongs to them constitutively.) Their first awareness of each other is as brother and sister, a virginal communion in their humanity.²⁶

in *Person and Community: Selected Essays*, trans. Theresa Sandok (New York: Peter Lang, 1993), 219–61 and 315–27.

²³ Karol Wojtyła, “Subjectivity and the Irreducible in the Human Being,” in *Person and Community*, 211.

²⁴ Karol Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, trans. H. T. Willetts (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1981), 27.

²⁵ John Paul II gives two meanings to what he calls “original solitude” in the Wednesday Catechesis. Man is created as a whole person alone before God in His image. He still lacks relationship with another human person like himself yet different in order to fulfill himself. Eve is created as a “double solitude.” *Man and Woman*, October 24, 1979, 6, nos. 1–4; October 31, 1979, 7, nos. 1–4; and November 7, 1979, 8, nos. 1–4.

²⁶ *Man and Woman*, February 13, 1980, 18, no. 5.

Priority of Virginal Communion

What John Paul II wants to emphasize by this is that the “virginity” of the human person, alone before God, from whom all his being is received, must always be at the base of any physical spousal communion in marriage.²⁷ The priority of this virginal communion is what pertains in the marriage of Mary and Joseph. Beyond the significance of virginity for establishing the integrity of the Incarnation of the Son of God, virginity plays a unique role in their marriage as the fruit of the gift of piety or reverence. St Joseph was heir to the whole Old Testament tradition, arising from Genesis 1:29–30, “Increase and multiply and fill the earth.” Virginity, especially in marriage, was alien to the chosen people who awaited the Messiah. How was it that Joseph took this unusual step in his marriage to Mary? I would like to propose a reflection on Joseph’s vow of virginity arising from his piety before the stupendous fact of Mary’s divine motherhood.²⁸

Scripture scholar Ignace de la Potterie has made an exhaustive analysis of the text concerning the Annunciation to Joseph (Mt 1:18–25). After Mary was found with child, the text goes on:

But Joseph, her spouse, who was a just man, and who was unwilling to unveil (her mystery), resolved to secretly separate himself from her. But as he devised his plan, behold an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said to him: “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary your spouse into your home; for certainly that which has been begotten in her comes from the Holy Spirit.” (Mt 1:19–20)

De la Potterie sees the initial sentence as key, which in Greek reads: Ἰωσήφ δὲ ὁ ἀνὴρ αὐτῆς, δίκαιος ὢν καὶ μὴ θέλων αὐτὴν δειγματίσαι, ἐβουλήθη λάθρα ἀπολῦσαι αὐτήν.²⁹ The meaning of the text, culminating in a true understanding of St. Joseph, rests on three

²⁷ David Schindler, following Joseph Ratzinger, calls this the state of *filiality*. “My being in its substantial unity is constitutively dependent on God and on others in God.” “The Embodied Person as Gift and the Cultural Task in America,” *Communio* (Fall 2008): 404. The gift of piety itself indicates the status of being a son.

²⁸ This reflection makes no claims on the objective state of sanctification of Joseph or when it took place, since that has not been determined by tradition; obviously the grace of virginity was given to Joseph to fulfill his role as the virginal husband of Mary. Rather this essay reflects on the subjective state of Joseph before the stupendous fact of the Incarnation of Christ in Mary’s womb. This reflection also does not preclude Joseph being a widower with several children, as some traditions maintain.

²⁹ Ignace de la Potterie, *Mary in the Mystery of the Covenant*, trans. Bertrand Buby (Bandra, Bombay: St. Paul’s, 1995), 79.

Greek words, δίκαιος (*dikaios*, just), δειγματίσαι (*deigmatissai*, unveil), and ἀπολύσαι (*apolusai*, separate).

The different translations of the word *dikaios* give an idea of the three ways the passage is interpreted. Those who translate “just” in a strictly legal sense portray Joseph’s justice as tempered but harsh. He decides to put Mary away rather than give her to be stoned, as the strict requirement of Jewish law for a woman caught in adultery would demand. A second interpretation translates *dikaios* as “good” and implies that although Joseph was suspicious he had a good heart and did not want to embarrass Mary. The trouble with this interpretation, says de la Potterie, is that *dikaios* is never translated as “good.” Such an interpretation attempts to read Joseph’s heart in a purely human way. The third and more biblical translation of *dikaios* is being in right relationship before God. The word has a different meaning for the Greeks, for whom it denoted a primarily social virtue of not transgressing the rights of others, a much more juridical view. The biblical meaning has to do above all with man’s relations with God and his walk with him.³⁰

On the basis of the different interpretations of the word *dikaios*, “just,” as well as the other two Greek words, *deigmatissai* and *apolusai*, de la Potterie proposes that at least three interpretations of the passage arose. First, Joseph thought Mary was guilty of adultery and wanted to put her away according to Jewish law.³¹ Second, Joseph believed in Mary’s innocence but did not know how to explain the pregnancy.³² The third reading, to which de la Potterie and several contemporary exegetes subscribe, is that Joseph knew that Mary’s conception was by divine intervention and he wished to distance himself as unworthy of her, just as Peter after the miracle of the fishes said to the Lord, “Depart from me for I am a sinful man.”³³ Joseph did not want to “unveil the mystery” and so he proposed to separate himself from Mary. John Paul II does not explicitly endorse this view, but he uses the word “astonishing” to describe Joseph’s view of Mary’s moth-

³⁰ Hermann Cremer, *Biblico-Theological Lexicon of New Testament Greek with Supplement*, trans. William Urwick (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1895) 184, 185.

³¹ De la Potterie points out (*Mary in the Mystery*, 82) that this was a fairly widespread view in the early Church, held by Justin, John Chrysostom, Ambrose, and Augustine, and that it has been held as well by some modern exegetes, e.g., J. Schmid, A. Descamps, and R. Brown.

³² *Ibid.*, 83. Jerome’s opinion was taken up in the Middle Ages and is held by some contemporary authors.

³³ *Ibid.* De la Potterie introduces a line-by-line exegesis of the text to support this reading. He points out (93) that this view was held by several Fathers of the Church. It is not, however, held by every exegete, for some of them see this as more a theological interpretation.

erhood, thus opening a way for such an interpretation. He seems to be aware of it also in his reference to the “mystery of Mary’s motherhood” when he comments on the passage (RC, no. 3).³⁴

De la Potterie then interprets Joseph as being “full of religious awe before the *mystery* which is accomplished in Mary.”³⁵ He withdraws from her out of reverence. The exegete finds confirmation of this through the words of the angel to Joseph, “Do not fear” (Mt 1:20). These words parallel those of Gabriel to Mary, “Be without fear, Mary . . .” (Lk 1:30). It is a “holy fear,” which is often expressed in the Bible at a direct intervention of God. This interpretation, which was widely accepted in the patristic era (both East and West) and in the Middle Ages, raises Joseph’s response from the moral or casuistic level to the sphere of salvation history.³⁶ De la Potterie’s summing up of the significance of this episode for all Christians is pertinent to our theme.

Joseph, the spouse of Mary, by his attitude of faith, humility and respect, furnishes us the example of the very first “acceptance” of this mystery. Thus his comportment becomes a model for *all* believers, especially today.³⁷

He goes on to say that discussion of Mary’s virginal conception is confined all too often to the physical aspects in order to raise doubt. Joseph’s attitude of reverence points rather to the *mystery* of God. In just the same way, it is reverence for the mystery of conjugal love within the sweep of salvation history that John Paul II wants to highlight in these last few pages on *Humanae Vitae* and a conjugal spirituality.

The Text of *Humanae Vitae*

We can see from de la Potterie’s exegesis of Matthew 1:18–25 that the correct translation of words is important. Likewise, Janet Smith has pointed out that the Latin word “*munus*,” which appears in the very first line of *Humanae Vitae*, is central to an understanding of the encyclical. The word has several meanings, from “reward,” “honor,” “gift” to “responsibility,”

³⁴ In formal Church documents John Paul II is conservative in his presentation of current scriptural exegesis, preferring to remain with well-proven interpretations. S. J. Prendergast, “A Vision of Wholeness: A Reflection on the Use of Scripture in a Cross-Section of Papal Writings,” in *The Thought of John Paul II: A Collection of Essays and Studies*, ed. John M. McDermott, S.J. (Rome: Editrice Pontificia Universita Gregoriana, 1993), 88.

³⁵ De la Potterie, *Mary in the Mystery*, 94.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 100–105.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 105.

“task,” “office,” “function.” Matrimony itself means the gift or duty of motherhood. Too often in English *munus* as duty is emphasized over the translation as reward or mission. Smith translates the “*munus*” of transmitting life in Paul VI’s encyclical as service to God, the Creator.³⁸ It is a mission God has given to married couples. She cites a key passage from the Vatican Council II document *Gaudium et Spes* (no. 51): “Let all be convinced that human life and the [*munus* of] its transmission are realities whose meaning is not limited to the horizons of this life only; their true evaluation and full meaning can only be understood in reference to man’s eternal destiny.”³⁹ Especially noticeable in the Council documents is the emphasis on all believers sharing in the three *munera* or missions of Christ as prophet, priest, and king. To be priest means to sacrifice; to be prophet, to evangelize; and to be king is to govern, including one’s self. For the Christian married couple, love and life constitute their saving mission in the Church and for the Church.⁴⁰ Smith concludes: “What is key here for understanding *Humanae Vitae* is to recognize that to reject the procreative power in sexual intercourse is not simply to reject some biological power; it is to reject a God-given *munus* and all it entails.”⁴¹

Here it would be profitable to examine the use of the adjective *iustus* (the Greek *dikaios*) in the encyclical and contrast it with the use of the adjective *rectus*. *Rectus* means upright or correct and it is used several times in *Humanae Vitae*, usually in connection with reason and right order, including right moral order and, here especially, the right order of generating offspring.⁴² The use of the word *iustus* seems to have a broader meaning. It first appears in no. 9, immediately after the marriage of the baptized is said to have the dignity of being the sacramental sign of Christ’s union with the Church. In fact the marks and requirements of conjugal love can be clearly seen in the light of this truth, and it is of the greatest importance to understand them in their right causes (*iustis momentis*). The same section (no. 9) speaks of unjust (*iniustas*) exceptions or reservations which cannot be admitted. The spouse is called to love with a total

³⁸ Janet Smith, *Humanae Vitae: A Generation Later* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1991), 270, 237. Smith examines its use in classical and medieval dictionaries as well as in Vatican II and other Church documents.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 136. Smith also notes that the word *munus* appears in the first line of the encyclical.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 143.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 145

⁴² *Humanae Vitae*, no. 10, *recte intellegenda* or rightly understood, *recta conscientia*, right conscience or *rerum bonorumque ordine recte servato*, the order of goods rightly observed.

love that loves the other not for any self interest but solely for the sake of the other. Again, in no. 16 *iustae* is used in reference to right causes or reasons, ones that are in conformity with the end of man. This broader use is noticeable again in no. 23, where Pope Paul VI speaks of having had justifiable concerns (*iustas curas*) in mind when he issued his encyclical *Populorum Progressio*. Finally, in no. 27 he speaks of couples seeking from physicians correct counsel (*recta consilia*) and a just way (*justam viam*), one in conformity again with man's true end.

The word reverence (*reverentia*) is used only once in *Humanae Vitae* in the way that John Paul II uses it at the end of the Catechesis on the Theology of the Body, but its use is significant. It appears in *Humanae Vitae* no. 17, where it refers to the unsurpassable limits of the power of man over the natural [*munera*] of the body. These limits are derived from reverence [*ob reverentiam*] owed to the whole human body and its natural operations (*naturalibus muneribus*). I would say, therefore, that the virtue of reverence or piety is intimately linked with justice towards the Creator in respecting the "vital structures of life" and his design of salvation.⁴³

Justice Towards the Creator

Before we turn to an analysis of the gift of reverence in the Catechesis, it is useful to see what John Paul II has to say in his philosophical treatment of conjugal love in *Love and Responsibility*.⁴⁴ The fourth section is entitled "Justice towards the Creator." First he deals with marriage as horizontal justice. Marriage both is an institution and as such is established according to a concept of justice.⁴⁵ It has two dimensions, interpersonal and social. It is first and foremost an interpersonal relationship of love, which normally extends into the structure of the society of the family with procreation. For the marriage relationship to be just, the interpersonal character must be realized to the full, and only if this is the case will the resulting family be a healthy society. The importance of marriage as an *institution* lies in justifying the sexual relationship between

⁴³ Linking justice as obeying God's laws with love is a constant theme of John Paul II. He joins devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus directly to justice. "Blessed are they who observe justice, who do righteousness at all times" (Ps 106:3)." John Paul II, "Address at Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Sunday, June 6, 1999. www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/travels/documents/hf_j

⁴⁴ *Love and Responsibility* was first a series of lectures at the University of Lublin, 1958–59. The future pope was moved to reflect on the person and love from his pastoral experience with many who shared their own personal and spiritual journey with him. The work was intended to "give voice to this testimony." Karol Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, 9.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 216.

a man and a woman in the eyes of society and so giving it the protection it needs to fulfill its purpose.⁴⁶

Beyond the social justification, it is a fundamental requirement that sexual relations between a man and a woman are justified in the eyes of the Creator. Because of creaturely dependence on the Creator, God's proprietorial rights over man must be respected. This is especially important in marriage, which makes each spouse as it were the property of the other. Since the person is first and foremost the property of God, His approval must be obtained for the spouse both to surrender himself and to receive the other's reciprocal gift of self. God's proprietorial rights are especially expressed in the intersection of the personal order and the order of nature. Sexual relations are justified if they conform to the personalist norm, which is a "union of persons affected by the possibility of procreation."⁴⁷ In other words, in marriage both the personal order and the order of nature meet. Love demands awareness of the possibility of parenthood in the sexual relationship. In order to be brought to its full realization, the order of nature cannot be mastered by force as in technology. It requires conscious cooperation through self-mastery.⁴⁸ This is where respecting the natural times of fertility inscribed in the woman's body is "closely bound up with that justice to the Creator."⁴⁹ The continence necessary also affirms the value of the person when it is disinterested and motivated by "just" reasons for avoiding pregnancy.

The whole order of nature has its origin in God. Animals follow God's laws through instinct. Man, on the other hand, has been endowed with reason. He can consciously know God's laws and conform to them. By doing so he becomes what is called *particeps Creatoris*. He participates in God's own purposes for creation. God has created the world in love and for love. As a person made in the image of God, man is called to love both God and others. Only when man and woman raise their marital relations to the level of love, in full recognition of God's rights over the order of nature and the personal order, do they reach a truly personal union.⁵⁰

It is this call to love that both elevates and surpasses the order of nature. The need to give one's self to another has deeper roots than the sex urge. It is at the core of man's creation in the image of the Trinitarian God of

⁴⁶ Ibid., 219–20.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 227.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 228, 229.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 241.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 246–48. For a more extensive analysis of Karol Wojtyła's treatment of justice towards the Creator, see Janet Smith, "Conscious Parenthood," *Nova et Vetera* 6 (2008): 927–50.

love. In the normal course of things, man expresses this orientation to another in love through the one-flesh union of marriage. Yet by a special grace, the person can give himself to God in a total and exclusive gift of self, and this is usually expressed in physical virginity. Such a primary orientation to God at the heart of consecrated virginity looks to the *eschaton*, where there is no marriage or giving in marriage. It does not follow, however, that the married person renounces God for another human being. Both vocations represent a call to perfection through love.⁵¹ The Holy Family, as we have seen, is a supreme example of the total gift of self in both virginity and marriage and, as John Paul II says, is a model for both.

The Gift of Piety or Reverence

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, in listing piety as one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, says: "They [the gifts] complete and perfect the virtues of those who receive them. They make the faithful docile in readily obeying divine inspirations."⁵² In reference to docility in marriage John Paul II cites a passage of *Humanae Vitae*:

Christian married couples, then, docile to [Christ's] voice, must remember that their Christian vocation, which began at Baptism, is further specified and reinforced by the Sacrament of Marriage. *By it husband and wife are strengthened and as it were consecrated* for the faithful accomplishment of their proper duties, for the carrying out of their proper vocation to perfection, and for the Christian witness which is proper to them before the whole world. To them the Lord entrusts the task of making visible to men the holiness and sweetness of the law which unites the mutual love of husband and wife with their cooperation with the love of God, the author of human life (*HV*, no. 25).⁵³

This docility applies to all the gifts of the Spirit but is especially pertinent in the gift of piety. Nowhere is the gift of piety or reverence more visible in marriage than in relation to the conjugal act. John Paul II offers the following definition:

Reverence for the twofold meaning of the conjugal act in marriage, which is born from the gift of reverence for God's creation, manifests itself also as a salvific fear: as the fear of violating or degrading what bears in itself the sign of the divine mystery of creation and redemption. It is this fear that the author of Ephesians speaks about. "Be subject to one another in the fear of Christ" (Eph 5:21).⁵⁴

⁵¹ John Paul II, *Love and Responsibility*, 250–57.

⁵² *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1831.

⁵³ The passage is in John Paul II, *Man and Woman*, October 3, 1984, 126, no. 1.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, November 14, 1984, 131, no. 5.

Reverence is the attitude that upholds justice towards the Creator, when a person honors the interpersonal character of spousal love and its procreative purposes. It also specifies the consecration to the perfection of holiness that Paul VI speaks about in *Humanae Vitae*.⁵⁵ The encyclical in this way lays the foundation for a Christian spirituality of conjugal life and vocation.⁵⁶

It is not a new spirituality but one that is rooted in the whole Christian tradition of marriage and of spiritual life in general. What is new is the application of the *ascesis* of continence to conjugal love. Continence is part of the virtue of temperance, which the ancient philosopher Aristotle named one of the four cardinal virtues and which Thomas Aquinas further analyzed in the light of the theological fact of concupiscence resulting from original sin. Concupiscence or disordered desire detached the body from the truth of its orientation to love especially in the union of man and woman. While St. Augustine could not accept that the conjugal act could be entirely free of concupiscence, Aquinas allowed for an ordering of the passions through the right use of reason.⁵⁷ John Paul II lays greater stress on love as the key in overcoming concupiscence. In Creation, through the grace of original innocence, perfect harmony of body and soul enabled Adam and Eve to see and love each other as God loves—with a disinterested love.⁵⁸ Through the grace of the sacraments, redemption in Christ has restored the capacity to reorder the passions to love.⁵⁹ As he shows in his Catechesis on the theology of the body, this has profound implications for the sacrament of marriage. Resistance to concupiscence through the virtue of temperance is transformed directly

⁵⁵ Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae* no. 25.

⁵⁶ See especially *Man and Woman*, October 3, 1984, 126, nos. 1–5.

⁵⁷ In steering a middle way between the Manichaeans and the Pelagians, Augustine was walking a tightrope and was without the philosophical categories later available to Thomas Aquinas. Against the Manichaeans, he proclaims that “marriage and fornication are not two evils, the second of which is worse; but marriage and continence are two goods, the second of which is better.” Against the Pelagians, he affirms that “while continence is of greater merit, it is no sin to render the conjugal debt, but to exact it beyond the need for generation is a venial sin.” St. Augustine, “The Good of Marriage (*De Bono Conjugali*),” in *Treatises on Marriage and Other Subjects*, ed. J. Deferrari, trans. Charles T. Wilcox (New York: Fathers of the Church, 1955), ch. 7, p. 17, and ch. 8, p. 20. In the *Summa theologiae* Aquinas states: “Since in man the concupiscible power is naturally governed by reason, the act of concupiscence is so far natural to man as it is in accord with reason; while, in so far as it trespasses beyond the bounds of reason, it is, for a man, contrary to reason. Such is the concupiscence of original sin.” *ST* I–II, q. 82, a. 3, ad 1.

⁵⁸ John Paul II, *Man and Woman*, January 7, 1981, 52, no. 1.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, December 3, 1980, 49, no. 1.

into the power of love with the help of actual grace. Love does not simply control disordered desire but brings about “*deeper and more mature values*,” expressed in the power of the spouses to become a reciprocal gift, and to express the language of the body in truth.⁶⁰

John Paul II analyzes here the way in which the *ascesis* of continence required for living out the Church’s teaching on responsible parenthood, while difficult, enriches all of what he calls the *affective manifestations* between the spouses. Far from being opposed to loving communion, continence actually brings it to full realization.⁶¹ Conjugal communion is made up of far more than the ecstatic experience of sexual intercourse. John Paul II has made a particular study of emotion in his previous philosophical work drawing on insights from psychology.⁶² While sexual arousal is a physical reaction to either masculinity or femininity, there is another reaction which he calls *psycho-emotive*. It has less to do with the body than with the subjective experience of masculinity or femininity and is directed to the *whole* person. It is the task of the person through continence not just to restrain these psycho-emotive reactions in a negative sense but to orient them in an appropriate way to love.⁶³

The person learns, especially through respecting the natural rhythms of fertility, when love is to be expressed through the “affective manifestations” only and when it may be fulfilled in the conjugal act. Each is a form of self gift: both respect the procreative potential of the person and the proprietorial rights of the Creator either through abstinence or through complete physical union. In *Love and Responsibility* John Paul II shows how the woman is more drawn to emotional values and the man to the physical, sensual values of the body. The times of continence allow development of the “manifestations of affection,” which are so necessary to the woman, if she is to welcome the physical advances of her husband. By affirming her whole personhood, those times free her from any sense of simply being a sexual object. As the tradition shows, the personal communion of man and woman cannot be brought about by concupiscent desire alone, since it has been deformed by original sin. By insisting on the virtue of continence or purity in the proper regulation of births, *Humanae Vitae* points the way to a restoration of the spousal meaning of the body and the fulfillment of love in the conjugal union.

John Paul II wants to emphasize the significance of the attitude of “*reverence for the work of God*” in these “affective manifestations.” They express an

⁶⁰ Ibid., October 24, 1984, 128, no. 2, and October 31, 1984, 129, no. 1.

⁶¹ Ibid., nos. 4 and 5.

⁶² Karol Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, 109–14.

⁶³ John Paul II, *Man and Woman*, October 31, 1984, 129, no. 5.

interest in the other that does not have the possessiveness of sexual intercourse. They show a delight and pleasure in the physical and spiritual beauty and gift of the person in his or her masculinity or femininity. Such a climate of reverence for the person has the power to bring about a truly mature and personal communion. That is the great gift of *Humanae Vitae* for conjugal spirituality. It ensures a proper harmony between the procreative and unitive significances of conjugal love, between *agape* and *eros*. It is the only spirituality worthy of the family as the “domestic church.”

The Gift of Reverence and the Holy Family

In *Redemptoris Custos* John Paul II has proposed the Holy Family as the model for all Christian families. How can that be, since there was no conjugal intercourse in the Holy Family? The answer lies, it seems to me, in the gift of reverence. We saw how there are three exegetical interpretations of Joseph’s response to Mary’s pregnancy. The first is legalistic and harsh; the second implies a kind of sentimentality. The third, the one preferred by John Paul II, interprets Joseph’s whole attitude as imbued with a gift of reverence for the mystery taking place in Mary.⁶⁴ When Joseph is given the title “just,” it is understood that he possesses all the virtues of the just man in the Old Testament. In marriage he would expect to honor the command of Genesis to “increase and multiply.” He would also participate in what has been called the “profoundly *spiritual, religious* institution” of Family Purity.⁶⁵ A contemporary Jewish author, Norman Lamm, has given an account of the practice of Family Purity and its role in the holiness of Jewish marriage. Both husband and wife are expected

⁶⁴ The pope similarly finds three interpretations of the teaching of *Humanae Vitae* on responsible parenthood. In *Love and Responsibility* he addresses the issue of the first two interpretations of the proper regulation of births. Totally excluded is the use of contraceptive methods, which has been justified under the theory of the fundamental option that a single act does not harm the goodness of the person. Equally excluded is the rigorous interpretation of the encyclical. “To say that sexual intercourse is permissible and justified only on condition that the partners hope to have a child as a result of it would be an exaggeratedly strict ethical position.” Wojtyła calls that another disguise for a utilitarian position, because intercourse is necessary for love as well as for procreation. Marital love is an interpersonal act first and foremost. It is enough to understand that in performing the act a child may result. Otherwise the act becomes a mere instrument to achieve pregnancy. The third interpretation is reverence for God’s design of marriage as an interpersonal communion, the path to extending his family in creation and a vocation to holiness. Karol Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, 57–61.

⁶⁵ Norman Lamm, *A Hedge of Roses: Jewish Insights into Marriage and Married Life* (New York: Philipp Feldham, Inc., 1966), 45.

to come to the wedding in a state of chastity and free of any negative views of the goodness of sex in marriage, which is both for procreation and for loving communion. The Institute of Family Purity protects both. In Jewish law a husband may not approach his wife during menses and seven days afterwards. During this time they are expected to show respect and affection towards each other but to avoid all physical caresses. At the end of the period the wife immerses herself in the *mikvah* or bath, after which relations may be resumed. In accordance with the natural rhythms of the woman's cycle, this coincides with the peak of fertility, so that procreation as well as loving communion is enhanced by the practice.

So important is the tradition of Family Purity that it is assigned priority by the Talmud over public prayer services, and harsh penalties are prescribed for its violation.⁶⁶ Lamm points out that *taharat ha-mishpahah*, "the purity of the family," is the name generally given to the code prescribed by Jewish law for husband and wife.⁶⁷ He lists all the benefits of the practice of Family Purity to the marriage and the couple's happiness: fostering of romance through periodic abstinence, respect for the wife as a person, the civilizing of sex.⁶⁸ Even beyond these benefits, he sees its role in the sanctification of time. Holiness of place is held in high regard in Judaism. The most sacred place on earth is the inner sanctum of the Temple. Holiness also attaches to objects such as "a properly written *Sefer Torah*." Yet, Lamm says, the holiness of time far surpasses the holiness of place.⁶⁹ The holiness of time is enshrined right at the beginning of the

⁶⁶ Ibid., 46.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 53.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 54–65. All of these benefits have been documented in the experience of faithful natural family planning couples.

⁶⁹ This is confirmed by Rabbi Heschel. "The sanctity of time came first, the sanctity of man came second and the sanctity of space last. Time was hallowed by God; space, the Tabernacle, was consecrated by Moses." "The meaning of the Sabbath," he says, "is to celebrate time rather than space. It is a day on which we are called upon to share in what is eternal in time, to turn from the results of creation to the mystery of creation; from the world of creation to the creation of the world." Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999), 10. For Heschel, the "unique events of historic time were spiritually more significant than the repetitive processes in the cycle of nature." Ibid., 7. Another rabbi, David Miller, would not include the woman's cycle as a mere repetitive cycle of nature, since the laws of family purity are bound up with the very existence of Israel. He accords to the Mikvah, or ritual bath of purification, a higher place than the Temple itself. The community can dispense with the Temple but not with the Mikvah. Miller writes that sexual intercourse was submitted to the restrictions of holiness to preserve it from lust." David Miller, *The Secret of the Jew: His Life and His Family*, vol. I (New York: Committee

Bible in the sanctification of the seventh day of creation, the Sabbath day of rest. The laws related to the Sabbath and festivals remind man, especially man (male), of the holiness of time. A woman does not need such reminders, since within her body is a rhythm that is attuned to time itself. If, however, this rhythm is not sanctified, says Lamm, she never attains the sanctity of time. "But if she observes the laws of Family Purity, then she has by virtue of observing this one *mitzvah* geared her inner clock, her essential periodicity, to an act of holiness."⁷⁰ He concludes: "The laws of Family Purity are, therefore, a divine gift to womanhood, allowing her to attain this highest form of sanctity. Her responsiveness to history—the arena where God makes His will manifest and where man confronts his Maker—is internal, not external."⁷¹ In sum, the law of Family Purity is an affirmation of life and its holiness.

Beyond the reverence Joseph would have had for the married state, imbued as he was with Jewish tradition, one can now understand the reverence he would have experienced when faced with the mystery of Mary's stupendous motherhood, carrying in her womb the source of holiness itself. Mary embodied the holiness of place, time, and eternity. With the Incarnation, eschatological time entered history. The virginity of Joseph was a response to the divine presence in his midst. Yet he still remained a husband, called to fulfill all the duties of protector and provider of Mary and Jesus. In commenting on Joseph's assent to the angel to take Mary into his home, John Paul II asks:

Are we not to suppose that Joseph's love as a man was not also given a new birth by the Holy Spirit? Are we not to think that the love of God which has been poured into the human heart through the Holy Spirit (cf RM, 5:5) molds every human love to perfection? This love molds—in a completely unique way—the love of husband and wife, deepening within it everything of human worth and beauty, everything that bespeaks an exclusive gift of self, a covenant of persons, and an authentic communion according to the model of the Blessed Trinity. (RC, no. 19).

By obeying the Spirit, Joseph found in the Spirit the source of love he experienced as a man and a husband. It "proved greater than this 'just man' could ever have expected within the limits of the human heart"

of Rabbi David Miller Foundation, 1930, revised 1938), xvi. *Kiddushin*, the Jewish term for marriage, means "continuous sanctification of life" and symbolizes the very essence of Judaism and the relations between God and Israel." *The Secret of the Jew*, xxvii.

⁷⁰ Lamm, *A Hedge of Roses*, 76.

⁷¹ Ibid.

(RC no. 19). In a similar way, the couple, by docilely and reverently obeying the Church's teaching in *Humanae Vitae*, will experience a love greater than they could ever have expected.

The Gift of Reverence and Conjugal Spirituality

John Paul II singles out three ways in which the gift of reverence pertains in the conjugal spirituality of the Christian couple: honoring God's design in creation by respecting the order of nature; preserving the interpersonal character of conjugal love; and fulfilling the sacramental dimension of marriage as a sign of Christ's union with the Church.

When stress is placed on the role of temperance in respecting the natural rhythms of fertility, it often seems that *Humanae Vitae* is more about not having sex than about joyful conjugal union. But we know and *Humanae Vitae* teaches that the conjugal act is designed for loving communion as well as for procreation. John Paul II interprets the Song of Songs as the way physical love would have been expressed in the Garden of Eden.⁷² Conversely, he sees in the resurrected state a perfect integration of the sensual, psychological, and spiritual powers of the human person, although they will be expressed only in virginal communion.⁷³ In the historical state of sin, this integration is only imperfectly achieved through the virtue of temperance and the grace of redemption. Yet a couple may come to such a maturity of love through purity of heart that they experience the physical delight of their love in all its beauty the way it was designed to be.⁷⁴ They give glory to God in such an act of communion. Pope Benedict XVI in his encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* has shown the link between *eros* and *agape*. Great love can only be expressed with passion, whether it is God's love for us in giving his only Son or the spousal love of a man and a woman giving their whole life to each other. The body as the expression of the person is the very means of the gift in the conjugal act. (The gift is also expressed

⁷² John Paul II, *Man and Woman*, "The Song of Songs," no. 108 (not delivered), fns. 95 and 96.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, February 10, 1982, 72, no. 4.

⁷⁴ The married contemplative Linda Sabbath found that intercourse was experienced not just on the genital level but in the heart. "On the genital level it is something like acid rock, breaking all the instruments, a certain kind of pleasurable violence, and then when it comes into the heart it's something like Bach and then when it goes beyond that it goes into ultrasound. The music becomes so refined, so delicate, so perfect, it is almost not heard." Mary Shivanandan, *Natural Sex* (New York: Berkley Books, 1979) 141, 142. Just as in the spiritual life an ecstatic experience is no criterion of the perfection of the union of the soul with God, so in human marriage an ecstatic sexual experience is no criterion of the overall quality of self-gift in the union.

when conjugal union is foregone for a higher purpose or a higher love, as in consecrated virginity, or when there are “just” reasons for avoiding pregnancy in marriage.) Reverence for God calls for an affirmation of the wonderful gift of conjugal union in marriage open to procreation.

The gift of conjugal union is given to enable the spouses to fulfill the arduous task of rearing the children God gives them. A natural awe accompanies the conception and birth of a child, made even greater by Christ sharing in our human condition.⁷⁵ Reverence for the gift of the child is part of the reverence implicit in the Church’s teaching in *Humanae Vitae*. Those couples are especially to be praised who prudently choose a large family. As John Paul II says, “Reverence for the two meanings of the conjugal act can fully develop only on the basis of a deep orientation to the *personal dignity* of what is intrinsic to *masculinity and femininity* in the human person, and inseparably in reference to the *personal dignity of the new life* that can spring from the conjugal union of man and woman.”⁷⁶

Beyond reverence for the interpersonal and procreative aspects of the conjugal relationship, the gift of piety regulates the couple’s relationship in Christ. John Paul II finds the gift of piety or reverence for Christ at the heart of the spousal relationship at the beginning of the passage in Ephesians 5 on marriage: “Be subject to one another in the fear of Christ” (Eph 5:21). It is the same fear or reverence before the sacred that Joseph expressed before the mystery of Mary’s conception of Christ in her womb. “Such *pietas, which springs from the profound consciousness of the mystery of Christ*, must constitute *the basis of the reciprocal relations between the spouses*.”⁷⁷ This is the “mystery of the election of each of them from all eternity in Christ ‘to be adoptive sons’ of God.”⁷⁸

The analogy of their marriage to the mystery of Christ and the Church brings a whole new dimension to the couple’s relationship. They are called to make visible the love of Christ for the Church and God’s eternal plan for mankind to participate in the communion of the Trinity. They have the awesome responsibility of “rereading the language of the

⁷⁵ John Saward brings this out in his book, *Redeemer of the Womb* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), in which he reflects on the Gospels, the writings of the Fathers, and the later witness of the Middle Ages and the Baroque Age, with a special reference to liturgical art, to emphasize the great dignity with which Christ has imbued every phase of human life, including the first nine months in the womb.

⁷⁶ John Paul II, *Man and Woman*, November 14, 1984, 131, no. 4.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, August, 11, 1982, 89, no. 1.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, no. 2.

body in truth" so that the splendor of Christ's love for the Church can shine forth. The gift of piety has a particular meaning here. It gives them a "deep reverence" for the teaching in *Humanae Vitae* on the significance of the two inseparable meanings of the conjugal act.⁷⁹ They become aware that in their shared life and vocation they manifest the very mystery of creation and redemption.

John Paul II echoes the encyclical *Humanae Vitae* in stressing the necessity of prayer and recourse to the sacraments to help build up the power of love which will enable them to overcome obstacles to living the truth of the language of the body.⁸⁰ Love is not the same as the concupiscence that draws the man and woman together and that is often mistaken for love. Love is a power that comes from God and enables the couple to adhere to the truth in their relationship and to say yes to God's plan for their marriage. Just as Joseph, in obeying the angel and taking Mary into his home, with all that implied for his married life of virginity, found a love greater than any he could have imagined, so in obeying God's call in their marriage, and sustained by the *donum pietatis*, couples can find an *inner harmony of marriage*, beyond any they might imagine.⁸¹ It is also intrinsic to their call to holiness.

Conclusion

The universal call to holiness was laid out for the first time in Vatican Council II in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*.⁸² Since that time there has been a great renewal of interest in the family as the "domestic church," which had been proposed by St. Augustine. The family as a sphere of holiness, however, sinks its roots deep in the Old Testament. Joseph Atkinson, in his forthcoming seminal study *Biblical and Theological Foundations of the Domestic Church*, shows how in the Old Covenant the Temple was the extraordinary sphere of holiness, the family the ordinary. Its very *raison d'être* as an image of the covenant was to be holy.⁸³ The practice of *Mikvah* constitutes an essential element of family purity or holiness by assuring marital chastity and respect for the vital structure of life. In other words, reverence for these structures which have God as their author lies at the heart of the family as a sphere of holiness.

⁷⁹ Ibid., November 14, 1984, 131, no. 4.

⁸⁰ Ibid., October 3, 1984, 126, no. 5.

⁸¹ Ibid., November 21, 1984, 132, no. 6.

⁸² *Lumen Gentium*, Chapter 5.

⁸³ Joseph Atkinson, *Biblical and Theological Foundations of the Domestic Church* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, forthcoming). Two thirds of the holiness code in Leviticus directly relates to sexual behavior.

In the New Covenant, by virtue of baptism, which incorporates them into the body of Christ, the Church, the spouses form a “domestic church,” where they encounter Christ in each other and in their children. Before being a sacrament, marriage is a created reality and needs to conform to the laws of love and life inscribed in the spouses’ bodies by the Creator. According to John Paul II, the gift of reverence or piety as the core of conjugal spirituality ensures respect for the vital structures of life and love. This faithful living out of their baptismal vows capacitates the spouses to fulfill their mission as a “domestic church” in the ordinary sphere of holiness, since marriage is a further specification of baptism. The presence of Christ at the heart of their communion and family life makes them a truly holy family on the model of the Holy Family. **N V**