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The carnal dimension of love of Catholic spouses

Abstract

According to the Encyclical *Humanae vitae* of Pope Paul VI, conjugal love should be human (sensual and spiritual), full, faithful and exclusive, and fruitful. Human sexuality has a purpose and meaning. In addition to the procreative meaning, it also contains a bonding element, openness to the needs of the other, love, care, interest. However, to be complete, it requires communication, also in terms of intimate needs. Their proper satisfaction, with the appropriate level of maturity and religious activity, is the basis for marital fidelity. A proper understanding of the essence of sexuality allows the development of openness to life and the selection of appropriate methods of family planning, consistent with moral standards. For Christians, religious principles are the basis for understanding human nature, also in the sexual dimension, at the same time being the basis for formulating and understanding adequate norms derived from natural law. Respecting the principles of Catholic moral ethics puts marriage and family life in order. The aim of the considerations is to present human sexuality as an expression of conjugal love, which should be human, full, faithful, exclusive and fertile. In order to consider the normative significance of religion in the sex life of Catholic couples, a critical analysis of various sources was conducted. This included examining Church documents, books, and articles in scientific journals. The method applied in this paper involved a critical analysis of selected texts and a synthesis of their content. The basis for the considerations will be the Encyclical *Humanae vitae* of Pope Paul VI supplemented with modern knowledge in the field of biology, psychology, sexology and theology of marriage and family.

Keywords

marriage, sexuality, religion, norms, *Humanae vitae*

1. Introduction

In the Christian tradition, the sacredness of marriage is based on the belief in its divine origin. Marriage as a sign of the action of Christ, who unites a man and a woman in an indissoluble covenant of love and life, strengthens and consecrates them for the fulfilment of their conjugal and parental duties so that they may glorify God and attain holiness and salvation. Pope Paul VI's Encyclical *Humanae vitae*¹ states that conjugal love should incorporate human elements such as sensuality, spirituality, whilst remaining complete, exclusive, faithful, and fruitful. Human sexuality, in this context, serves a purpose and holds meaning. Besides its procreative function, it promotes bonding and fosters openness to the needs of others, thus facilitating the expression of love, care, and interest.

Today, the breakdown of the traditional marriage relationship, the sexual revolution in the broadest sense of the word², the biologisation of love, negating its spiritual dimension, the attack on the Church, often seen as a bastion of outdated views and conservatism, may bewilder many, specifically young individuals in the process of developing their world view. In fact, it is the attainment of an appropriate level of maturity and religious commitment, together with a correct understanding of the nature of sexuality that is crucial for building a foundation of marital fidelity, openness to life and the choice of family planning methods in accordance with moral standards. For Christians, religious principles indeed provide a basis for understanding human nature, including its sexual dimension. They also aid in establishing and comprehending appropriate standards based on natural law. This is further reinforced by adherence to Catholic moral ethics, which grants structure to the life and family of the married couple, endowing it with a sense of understanding, significance, and meaning.

¹ Paweł VI, Encyklika *Humanae vitae*, Kraków 2003, (further: HV) no. 9.

² Rev. Andrzej Zwoliński seeks the causes of numerous pathologies related to the way love and sexuality are experienced in the sexual revolution. He mentions the influence of Wilhelm Reich's „moral liberation” (the pursuit of sexual satisfaction as an antidote to all ills); Sigmund Freud's thoughts, which suggested that the sexual drive was analogous to the need to eat; Abraham Maslow's theory, which elevated hedonism to an existential goal; Alfred Kinsey's report, which presented a new view of sexuality. Due to their emergence during a period of burgeoning sexual liberalism and presentation as scientific work, they have had a major impact on shaping public opinion in this area. A. Zwoliński, *Grzechy główne*, Kraków 2019, Homo Dei, p. 85–86.

Meanwhile, for many centuries, issues pertaining to gender and sexuality were viewed as taboo, even within the teachings of the Church. However, the Second Vatican Council prompted a shift in this mindset. Several Church documents emerged during this time that offered a Christian perspective on human sexuality. These documents include *Gaudium et spes*³, *Humanae Vitae*⁴, *Persona humana*⁵, numerous statements by John Paul II (including *Male And Female He Created Them*⁶ and *Letter to Families "Gratissimam sane"*⁷), as well as *Familiaris consortio*⁸ and *Evangelium vitae*.⁹ The importance of proper education in the area of human sexuality and love (*Gravissimum educationis*¹⁰, *Educational Guidelines on Human Love, Human Sexuality, The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality*¹¹, and *the Catechism of the Catholic Church*¹²) and the importance of moral education (*Encyclical Veritatis Splendor*¹³) were also stressed.

³ Paweł VI. (7 XII 1965), *Gaudium et Spes. Constitutio Pastoralis de Ecclesia In Mundo humus Temporis*. Sacrosanctum Concilium Oecumenicum Vaticanum II "Acta Apostolicae Sedis" (1966) 58, pp. 1025–1120. Available online: <https://www.vatican.va/archive/aas/documents/AAS-58-1966-ocr.pdf> (accessed on 28 March 2024).

⁴ HV.

⁵ Deklaracja o niektórych zagadnieniach etyki seksualnej *Persona Humana*. (29 XII 1975). Święta Kongregacja Nauki Wiary, „Acta Apostolicae Sedis” (1976) 68, p. 77–96.

⁶ Jan Paweł II, *Mężczyznę i niewiastę stworzył ich*, Lublin 1998, wyd. Katolicki Uniwersytet Lubelski.

⁷ Jan Paweł II (2 II 1994), List do rodzin *Gratissimam sane*, „Acta Apostolicae Sedis” (1994) 86, pp. 868–925.

⁸ Jan Paweł II (22 XI 1981), Apostolic exhortation *Familiaris consortio*, „Acta Apostolicae Sedis” (1982) 74, pp. 81–192. Available online: https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_19811122_familiaris-consortio.html (23.03.2024).

⁹ Jan Paweł II (25 III 1995), Encyklika *Evangelium vitae*, „Acta Apostolicae Sedis” (1995) 87, pp. 401–522.

¹⁰ *Wytyczne Wychowawcze Kongregacji do spraw Wychowania Katolickiego w odniesieniu do ludzkiej miłości*. (1 XI 1983). Kongregacja do spraw Wychowania Katolickiego. Rodzina Bogiem Silna. Dokumenty Kościoła. Wrocław 1983.

¹¹ *Ludzka płciowość. Prawda i znaczenie. Wskazania dla wychowania w rodzinie* (8 XII 1995; Polskie wydanie 1996), Papieska Rady ds. Rodziny, Łomianki 1996, Instytut Studiów nad Rodziną.

¹² *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. 2003. Available online: https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_INDEX.HTM (23.03.2024).

¹³ Jan Paweł II (6 VIII 1993), Encyklika *Veritatis splendor*, „Acta Apostolicae Sedis” (1993) 85, pp. 1133–1228.

2. The Human Dimension of Love

According to the teachings of the Church, conjugal love is deemed „fully human.”¹⁴ Its fullness and authenticity can only be achieved when it encompasses both physical and spiritual dimensions. Karol Wojtyła conducted a psychological analysis of human love and identified three levels. The fullness of this love, he believed, can only be attained when the levels are integrated appropriately. The first level, known as the sensual level, is typically established through sexual desire (and occasionally spiritual values). Indeed, sensual experiences and feelings accompany many male and female relationships. They can lead to admiration of the partner and appreciation of his or her broadly understood “beauty”. However, when pure sensuality takes precedence, the partner may be objectified and seen as a mere “consumable” commodity. In this regard, sensuality, an integral aspect of conjugal love, may be easily distorted, particularly among men. This is due to their innate reflexive and spontaneous sensory responses. While these naturally occurring reflexes are not inherently immoral, misusing them as objects of pleasure can subsequently lead to feelings of remorse as the individual should never be treated as an object. A further dimension involves sensuality expressed through tenderness, the desire for closeness, exclusivity and intimacy, including the sexual dimension. However, despite initially appearing to be devoid of desire, particularly in women, when affection becomes focused solely on the sexual aspect of femininity and masculinity, it may lead to objectification of the other individual if it is not integrated with the affirmation of the person. Proper integration and maturation of sensuality is expressed through one’s responsibility for oneself, one’s spouse, and one’s offspring. It is important to note that sensual desire and emotional involvement are highly subjective and dependent on the person concerned, and it is only by integrating them with the objective truth of human dignity that the value of the “complete” human being can be recognised and affirmed leading to the final spiritual level of human love. And only by recognising the complete personal worth of the other, true human love can be experienced.¹⁵ According to Karol Wojtyła, spousal love is the most perfect and the fullest type of love as it affirms the complete individual and is a mutual gift of oneself which is offered infinitely and also requires spiritual

¹⁴ HV, no. 9.

¹⁵ Cf. K. Wojtyła, *Osoba a miłość*, Lublin 1986, Dajmonion, pp. 49–72, 79–83.

exertion. What is noteworthy is that this type of love can only attain its fullest expression in conjugal love (or in consecrated life).¹⁶

Human conjugal love is therefore all-encompassing, embracing both the sensual (bodily) and spiritual dimensions. These two dimensions are also intertwined in Pope Francis' exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, which points out that the spiritual and sensual spheres cannot be isolated from each other, as this would contradict the essence of marriage. Complete love for the spouse involves both his or her spiritual sphere and body.¹⁷ Indeed, love that unites the bodies and souls of the spouses, based on a high degree of understanding and respect, is not solely the result of instinctive impulses; it is not merely a primitive drive or emotion, but it is an act of the will "that is meant not only to survive the joys and sorrows of daily life, but also to grow, so that husband and wife become in a way one heart and one soul" and they achieve their human perfection.¹⁸

Bogdan Wojciszke's contemporary psychological theory of love, which includes intimacy, passion, and commitment, aligns with this framework.¹⁹ Intimacy is characterised by warmth, closeness, connection, bonding and a genuine concern for the other person's well-being. It involves feeling happy in his or her presence, showing respect, building trust, achieving mutual understanding, sharing experiences and both spiritual and material goods. Intimacy also encompasses the giving and receiving of emotional support, exchanging intimate information and considering the partner as an important part of one's life. Passion entails the experience of intense emotions, both positive and negative ones such as fascination, delight, excitement, desire, tenderness, and joy, as well as suffering, anxiety, fear, longing, and jealousy. It is characterized by a strong motivation to connect with the object of love and may involve physical closeness and sexual contact. Passion is frequently misinterpreted as love, particularly by young people, despite being distinct from it. While sexual desires are an essential component, it also blends in other needs like self-esteem or a sense

¹⁶ Wojtyła differentiated between love as a predilection, rooted in emotional and psychological factors, love as desire with a significant element of sensuality, and love as kindness, akin to love-based friendship rooted in shared values (K. Wojtyła, *Miłość i odpowiedzialność*, Lublin 1986, wyd. Katolicki Uniwersytet Lubelski, p. 8.

¹⁷ Cf. R. Pomarańska, *Analiza porównawcza cech miłości małżeńskiej na podstawie Familiaris Consortio i Amoris Laetitia*, „Studia Warmińskie” (2022) 59, pp. 363–369.

¹⁸ Cf. HV, no. 9.

¹⁹ Cf. B. Wojciszke, *Psychologia miłości. Intymność, namiętność, zobowiązanie*. Gdańsk 2013, Gdańskie Wydawnictwo Psychologiczne, pp. 7–13.

of belonging. Commitment involves all the actions, decisions, thoughts and feelings targeted at both the welfare of the other person and the conversion of love into a long-lasting relationship. It stems from free will, a conscious decision, and a yearning for that other person to remain part of one's lives forever. Even during periods of marital hardship or waning affection, it enables spouses to remain dedicated to one another.²⁰ In this context, the ideal state is unconditional, perfect love, the aspiration of every marriage, particularly at its start, comprising all three elements of love (albeit their intensity varying over time) and signifying profound, mature marital relations. Its creation requires time and the desire to be together through thick and thin, until death.²¹

3. The Fullness of Love

Conjugal love is sometimes defined as a special form of friendship wherein spouses generously share everything with each other while keeping selfishness and injustice at bay. True love is altruistic, shunning selfish actions. Spouses in love disregard fair shares, contracts or service exchanges. They complement each other, try to do their best, enjoy the opportunity to bring joy and enrich each other. It is an expression of true love, giving of oneself, following the example of how Christ gave himself for us.²² Conjugal love is also a unique form of gift that enriches the spouse and the acceptance of his or her gift; it is an act that fosters mutual growth.²³ In this regard, each act of close intimacy embodies a particular mode of communication in which total self-giving to the other person and, at the same time, the acceptance of his or her total gift of self are materialised. This gift, in the context of sacramental marriage, expresses the essence of the marriage vows.²⁴ To understand this, however, it is essential

²⁰ Cf. S.K. Ciccarelli, N.J. White, *Psychology*, New Jersey 2015, Pearson Education, p. 476.

²¹ Cf. H. Fischer, *Why we love: The Nature and Chemistry of Romantic Love*, New York 2005, Henry Holt and Company, pp. 92–93.

²² Cf. R. Pomarańska, *Analiza porównawcza...*, p. 368.

²³ Cf. HV, no. 9.

²⁴ Marriage, as Elio Sgreccia emphasises, is an expression of complementarity that is also a sign of incompleteness. This lack of completeness necessitates complementation, including within the realm of giving, which results in necessary completeness (M. Machinek, *Przesłanie Humanae vitae z perspektywy pięćdziesiątej rocznicy ogłoszenia encykliki*, "Teologia i Moralność" (2018) 24, pp. 18–19.

to increase awareness of the role of love and the marital relationship. The Encyclical *Humanae Vitae* underscores their spiritual and theological importance, stressing that their true nature and dignity are revealed when it is realised that they are rooted in God, who is love and the Father of all fatherhood in heaven and on earth.²⁵ Only in the perspective of God—his Creator—can man be fully understood.

Conjugal love, therefore, as a renunciation of selfishness, is directed towards the good of the other and thus constitutes the foundation of the spiritual and typically human dimension of the conjugal and family relationship.²⁶ Indeed, marriage is a sacred bond based on the commitment to care for the good of one's spouse in both the temporal and spiritual spheres. It follows that each spouse has a moral obligation to adapt to the needs of the other.²⁷ True love is the act of directing one's will towards the well-being of the beloved person, sacrificing oneself for his or her well-being, respecting his or her desires, and supporting his or her development and drawing closer to God. Its antithesis is selfishness, hedonism or the treatment of the other person as a means to attain one's own objectives. Therefore, in order to build profound, long-lasting and meaningful relationships, the fullness of love, including its spiritual dimension, is an indispensable element. For "whoever really loves his partner loves not only for what he receives, but loves that partner for the partner's own sake, content to be able to enrich the other with the gift of himself."²⁸

It is important to note that the openness to intimacy, including the sexual dimension, is directly linked to the gift. Remarkably, this is not as straightforward as it might seem. Most people, regardless of age, deem sexual abilities or skills to be innate. However, for these abilities to benefit one's partner, they require an understanding of his or her specifics (differences), needs and desires, openness, forbearance, altruism and the time needed to tune in together. It is worth emphasizing that the most suitable time for this attunement is during the "honeymoon phase" when spouses, who are deeply in love and eager to be intimate with one another, are as receptive as possible to being a gift to one

²⁵ Cf. K. Wojtyła, *Nauka encykliki Humanae vitae o miłości*, „Analecta Cracoviensia” (1969) 1, p. 343.

²⁶ Cf. G. Grzybek, P. Tobiczki, *Religijne i kulturowe uwarunkowania seksualności a wychowanie do rozwoju osobowości etycznej*, „Ars Inter Culturas” (2017) 6, p. 90.

²⁷ Cf. O. A.M. Czaja, *Znaczenie miłości małżeńskiej w aspekcie kanoniczno-pastoralnym*, „Prawo Kanoniczne” (2018) 61, no. 2, p. 100.

²⁸ HV 9.

another.²⁹ The physical closeness between partners brings pleasure and releases oxytocin, which can positively affect the stability and longevity of their relationship. It is essential to remember that a woman can fully embrace her sexuality when her husband exhibits a mature demeanour. This entails demonstrating tenderness, selflessness, fostering open communication, engaging in day-to-day activities, expressing concern for their children and showing interest in the maternal role of his wife. Such traits enable him to become a “selfless gift of self”, which involves the transmission of life.³⁰ For every sexual act, potential fertility is inextricably linked as procreation is inscribed in the very essence of sexual behaviour.³¹ It is appropriate to affirm that every sexual act possesses both spousal (gift of self) and parental (procreative) significance, and, thus, it cannot be solely reduced to a mere pleasure-seeking experience or an essential component for the conception of a child.

A truly mature approach for Christian spouses is to remain receptive to the possibility of new life during every intimate encounter, and to embrace it fully, even in cases of unplanned conception.³² This outlook reduces frustration and anxiety during intercourse, given that neither natural nor artificial family planning methods provide a 100% guarantee of effectiveness. In this regard, it is important to note that the moral value of the sexual act as a complete act of self-giving remains unaffected by whether it takes place during fertile or infertile periods.³³ By establishing a cyclical pattern of fertility and infertility in human couples, God has granted the liberty to make prudent decisions concerning the number of offspring or frequency of births.³⁴ The recognition of shared fertility is one of the essential factors in maintaining the marital bond, which requires

²⁹ In mature relationships, including sexual ones, the level of selfishness decreases while the ability to coordinate one's own needs and those of the partner increases, M. Komorowska-Pudło, *Psychospołeczne uwarunkowania postaw młodzieży wobec seksualność*, Szczecin 2020, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Szczecińskiego, pp. 34–35.

³⁰ Cf. E. Lichtenberg-Kokoszka, *Seks w konfesjonale. Bo nic co ludzkie nie jest nam obce*, Kraków 2023, Impuls, p. 204.

³¹ Cf. R. Buttiglione, *Znaczenie aktów seksualnych w obrębie języka ciała*, „Zeszyty Formacji Duchowej” (2005) 28, Duchowość i seksualność, p. 45.

³² Cf. K. Krajewski, *Moralne zło antykoncepcji.*, in: *Dar ciała darem osoby. O przemilczanym wymiarze kryzysu więzi małżeńskiej* (ed.), Piotr Ślężyczka, Lublin 2005, wyd. Towarzystwo Naukowe KUL, pp. 31–36.

³³ Cf. R. Buttiglione, *Znaczenie aktów seksualnych...*, p. 42.

³⁴ See HV, no. 10, 16.

an effort on the part of both partners. Both spouses should learn to recognise the cyclical female fertility, to control their impulsive tendencies and passions, and to respect the biological laws inherent in gender. In addition, full acceptance of one's spouse requires acceptance of her fertility. Eliminating it (through contraceptive methods) challenges the fundamental principle of valuing it as an undesirable element that should be discarded. It should be acknowledged at this point that many men, especially those who are immature, impulsive or driven purely by sexual desire, want to have a sexual intercourse at any time. In such circumstances, support for contraception is widespread, but its impact includes the objectification of women (reducing them to objects of sexual gratification), their increasing disengagement from procreation (through fear of unwanted pregnancy), and negative emotional effects on relationships. The extent to which women are open to contraception may make it difficult for men to mature, take responsibility for their own sexual activity, fatherhood and fidelity.

4. Fidelity and Exclusivity

The marriage vow of conjugal love made in the presence of God entails a conscious commitment to direct one's affections solely towards his or her spouse and to maintain this commitment until death. According to *the Catechism of the Catholic Church*, marriage requires unity, which means that the marital relationship is monogamous and concluded between a man and a woman.³⁵ Additionally, marriage requires indissolubility, which stems from the nature of human love striving for exclusivity. This is because the human psychic space is constricted and can only accommodate a few people, deep psychic contact, understanding and closeness can only be established in a couple. Human beings also have a deep inner need to make this one and only relationship more meaningful, to be special to the other person and for the other person to be special to that person. This is because love, including sexual love, cannot be shared between different people without losing its value.³⁶ What is more, individuals in a traditional relationship generally experience greater enjoyment and emotional fulfilment from sexual encounters (although, it must be noted that demonstrating marital

³⁵ Cf. G. Grzybek, P. Tobaczyk, *Religijne i kulturowe uwarunkowania seksualności...*, p. 90.

³⁶ Cf. W.K. Kilpatrick, *Psychological Seduction*, Nashville, Tennessee 1997, Thomas Nelson Publishers, p. 249.

maturity characterised by an openness to their partner's sexual desires plays a vital role in this regard). This is in contrast to individuals engaging in more casual sexual encounters.³⁷ "Open marriage" and polygamy do not prevent infidelity, and these types of relationships can involve various emotions, including commitment, attachment, love, jealousy, anxiety, and suffering. These are not simply the wife's benevolent reaction to the man's undisclosed sexual desires and fantasies. Many women experience psychological and moral discomfort due to their husband's infidelity given that the arousal caused by a sexual intercourse with another individual is short-lived and necessitates constant, progressively elaborate stimulation.³⁸

Occasionally one may hear that marital fidelity (especially from the male perspective) is not possible.³⁹ Meanwhile, most extramarital sexual relationships are due to problems in the relationship rather than to sexual needs per se. When the desires and needs of the spouse are met correctly by the partner, in an atmosphere of mutual openness, kindness and acceptance, with proper communication and a successful sex life, the need to seek satisfaction outside the marriage becomes unnecessary. Therefore, it is the quality of the relationship built by the spouses which influences their level of fidelity or infidelity. Spouses who experience fulfilment within their relationship and satisfaction with their sexual life typically exhibit no interest in pursuing emotional and sexual relationships beyond the confines of marriage.⁴⁰

To achieve complete union and happiness, it is essential for both parties to demonstrate fidelity, exclusivity, honesty and marital chastity. Love is manifested in a deep concern for the wellbeing and dignity of the spouse, unwavering

³⁷ Cf. J. Bancroft, *Human sexuality and its problems*, Edinburg, London, New York, Oxford, Philadelphia, St Louis, Sydney, Toronto 2019, Elsevier, p. 220.

³⁸ Cf. G. Masterton, *Magia seksu*, Poznań 2013, Rebis, pp. 200–201.

³⁹ Such a view reduces men to beings who cannot control their own sex drive. However, a lack of such control is indicative of psychosexual immaturity (and seldom a specific type of libido), rather than a typical male characteristic (although males tend to have greater sexual reactivity than females, and managing it can take significant time, particularly during puberty). Z. Lew-Starowicz, *Kluczowe pojęcia: seks i erotyzm, miłość i związek*, in: *Jak się kochać? Edukacja seksualna dla każdego*, (eds.), A. Długołęcka, Z. Lew-Starowicz, Warszawa 2010, Świat Książki, pp. 12–15; B. Trzeciak, *Życie intymne. Wybrane zagadnienia z seksuologii*, Kołobrzeg 2012, Wydawnictwo REDA Kazimierz Ratajczyk, p. 19.

⁴⁰ Cf. Ch. Northrup, P. Schwartz, J. Witte, *The normal bar. The surprising secrets of happy couples and what they reveal about creating a New normal In your relationship*, New York 2021, Harmony, p. 241.

loyalty in all circumstances, and adherence to the commandments of God. Religiousness, piety and morality are important factors in the relationship with God and people.⁴¹ Indeed, a spiritual bond based on mutual devotion and nurturing affection allows for the stabilisation of relationships and a sense of security for all members of the marriage and family.⁴²

5. Fertility

Conjugal love is always fruitful love that is focused on future generations. It extends beyond procreation and encompasses a creative, imaginative life, which is expressed in marriage by supporting the development of the spouse and the offspring, creating an atmosphere conducive to growth, attachment, self-esteem and self-dignity. Fruitful love extends beyond the community of the spouses, seeking to include others. Fertility is not merely an external element artificially added to conjugal love, but expresses its proper essence.⁴³ Fertility, inscribed in the plan of human creation, is a sign of God's blessing, which was articulated at the very dawn of human existence ("Be fruitful and multiply"; Genesis 1:28). The transmission of life and the creation of a wider family community is an expression of the appropriate cooperation between spouses and God's fruitful love.⁴⁴ The Christian faith posits that God Himself creates an immortal soul in the body transmitted by the parents. Hence, parents become God's co-labourers in creation and the offspring conceived by them is primarily God's gift and child. Since it is not possible to determine with certainty the number of children to be born into a family and the time at which they will be born, responsible parenthood means being open to this divine gift. If spouses remain closed off to God's sovereign will in the transmission of human life and nature, by solely focusing on their own plans and choices, then the cultivation of responsible parenthood and its openness to life will never fully mature. As collaborators with

⁴¹ Cf. U. Dudziak, *Religiousness of spouses as a factor contributing to shaping a successful marriage*, "Teologia i Moralność" (2022) 1 (31), p. 140.

⁴² Cf. A. Drożdż, *Miłość i odpowiedzialność—wyznaczniki kanonicznego przygotowania do małżeństwa. Dynamiczne fieri osoby—moralne zakorzenienie miłości i odpowiedzialności małżeńskiej*, Katowice 2013, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, pp. 49–50.

⁴³ HV, no. 9.

⁴⁴ Cf. A. Pryba, *Naturalne planowanie rodziny wewnętrznym aspektem odpowiedzialnego rodzicielstwa*, „*Verbum Vitae*” (2022) 40(1), p. 178.

the Creator, Christian parents who are receptive to God's will should honour the life they transmit, regardless of how it was conceived and even if it deviates from their intended plans.

Marriage, therefore, is inherently oriented towards procreation and the rearing of offspring, for this is its fulfilment and culmination. True conjugal love is characterized by openness to life. The unjustified, selfish rejection of the possibility of having offspring not only opposes God's plan, but also diminishes the very essence of love.⁴⁵ Offspring complete a family⁴⁶ and, as an exceedingly valuable gift to marriage, bring the greatest good to their parents, being the source of the strongest bonds.⁴⁷ The essence of marriage and conjugal love, according to the Second Vatican Council, is directed towards procreation and the process of raising children, which is viewed as their highest value and purpose.⁴⁸ In this regard, the key purpose of marriage and family is to serve life.

Deciding to marry, therefore, entails entering a new and deeper dimension of one's humanity expressed through fatherhood and motherhood. Sexuality, on the one hand, gives pleasure and a deep sense of togetherness, union and mutual belonging; on the other hand, it gives birth to life. Therefore, the conjugal act, being the full gift of the self and the acceptance of the gift of the other, is most fully expressed in the acceptance of the common destiny of being parents. In this context, conjugal sex life serves not only as a means of expressing spousal but also parental affection, becoming a site for the transmission of life.⁴⁹ For this reason, it should only occur between individuals who possess the capacity to responsibly welcome, protect, and lovingly guide this new life through its development. Contemporary scientific research in the fields of anthropology, psychology, pedagogy, sociology and theology indicates that the optimal setting for happy parenting and responsible upbringing of children is within a mature, enduring marital relationship. This assertion finds further validation in natural law. Within Catholic moral theology, it pertains to the essential ethical truths

⁴⁵ However, if a couple cannot conceive children due to infertility, their married life does not diminish in its worth, W. Polak-Jakuszkó, *Christian marriage and love*, "Łódzkie Studia Teologiczne" (2017) 1(26), p. 40.

⁴⁶ Cf. Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, no. 14.

⁴⁷ Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 50.

⁴⁸ Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 48.

⁴⁹ Cf. T.H. van de Velde, *Małżeństwo doskonałe. Jak stworzyć związek idealny. Fizjologia i psychologia płci*, Warszawa 2013, Czarna Owca, p. 39.

that arise from human nature. These truths serve as the foundation for establishing standards of conduct related to sexual behaviour. Religious principles, combined with natural law, make up the underlying basis for comprehending human sexuality in an ethical manner. This shapes standards such as disallowing contraception use, whilst concurrently stimulating responsible parenting and acknowledging the value of life from its very beginning. Catholic doctrine asserts that the fundamental aims of marriage include procreation, unity, and love between the spouses and the use of contraception is considered incompatible with these objectives.⁵⁰

Conclusions

“Marriage, then, is far from being the effect of chance or the result of the blind evolution of natural forces. It is in reality the wise and provident institution of God the Creator, whose purpose was to effect in man His loving design.”⁵¹ In this context, the laws that come from God and regulate marriage require theological and moral commentary, because they are not merely the invention of human will. Human beings are unique as they are created in the image and likeness of God, unlike any other earthly beings. Those who deny their inherent (including sexual) nature and the sanctity of marriage are committing a sin against God and themselves, as he is their Creator.⁵² The erotic dimension of love is neither an evil nor a burden to be tolerated, but a gift from God that beautifies the most profound, the intimate encounter of spouses, the realisation of pure, exclusive affirmation. The appropriate use of sexuality reveals the greatness of the human heart, bestowing happiness and inspiring the other person to live to the fullest.⁵³

⁵⁰ This is particularly the case as many of them (e.g. hormonal contraceptives or intrauterine device) also have an early abortifacient effect, E. Lichtenberg-Kokoszka, *Seks w konfesjonale...*, pp. 211–220.

⁵¹ HV, no. 8.

⁵² Cf. E. Varden, *The shattering of loneliness: On Christian Remembrance*, New York 2018, Bloomsbury Continuum, p. 135.

⁵³ Cf. Franciszek, *Amoris Laetitia*, pp. 152–156.

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