

THE SACRAMENT OF MATRIMONY AND THE CHRISTIAN CALL TO HOLINESS

Simon Okonkwo Areji¹

ABSTRACT

The Church's age long teachings on marriage have been characterized by many debates on the sacramentality or sanctity of matrimony. From the time that St. Paul talks about marriage and virginity and seems to have suggested to remain single or virgin, various redactions and interpretations have followed this Pauline teaching. Many heretics advanced this stand to the point of condemning marriage because it is connected with sexual activities which reduces the spirituality of man. But a diligent rebuttal of these heretical teachings occupied some of the Fathers of the Church. Augustine, Chrysostom and many others discussed the nobility and the goodness of marriage. It is important here to note that both within their (Fathers) time and many centuries after, the emphasis were more on building a theology of marriage. The individual or personal involvements of the couples as persons aspiring to holiness were not as such the focal point. But the Vatican Council II and after it many other teachings of the Church took a personalist approach which tries to evaluate the individual actions of the couples as implicating not just their choices but their expectations. Of great importance in these post conciliar teachings is that of the Great Pope of the Family: Saint John Paul II. Thus the couples' ability to live out the marital vows and conjugal charity in accordance with God's plans and institution as regards the sacrament of matrimony became of great focus. We attempted a sketch of: "The Sacrament of

¹ Simon Okonkwo Areji is a Priest of Catholic diocese of Nsukka. He obtained his doctorate degree from John Paul II Pontifical Theological Institute for Marriage and Family Sciences inside the Lateran University Rome.

Matrimony and the Christian Call to Holiness”. Since all Christians are called to holiness irrespective of their vocations or walks of life, marriage or matrimony is also a way of holiness.

Introduction

The protestant reformation made the Council of Trent (1545-1563) inevitable for the Catholic Church². In the XXIV session and the first canon of the eleventh day of November 1563, under the then Sovereign Pontiff, Pius IV, the council declared that: “If anyone shall say, that Matrimony is not truly and properly one of the seven sacraments of the evangelical law, instituted by Christ the Lord; but that it has been instituted by men in the Church, and that it does not confer grace; let him be anathema”³. Marriage being one of the sacraments, becomes that which according to the teachings of the Catholic Church, is an outward sign of inward grace instituted by Jesus Christ through which grace is conferred on our souls. Today more than ever, owing to a preponderance of a truncated spirituality, holiness is seen as actions which transcend certain vocations. Does a diligent, conscientious and faithful living out of the matrimonial vows and responsibilities enough to make the Christian spouses make heaven or should they invent a certain spirituality to enable them achieve that?

Our task in this article is to undertake a survey of how in the context of this sacramentality of matrimony, through the outward signs and features of the lives of the couples, they can realize heaven which is our ultimate goal as Christians. In attempting this, we begin with a brief historical itinerary of not only the emergence of matrimony as a sacrament but in a specific way the reasons why many epochs did not emphasize this vocation as a way of sanctity but concentrated more on its theology. We shall arrive at a personalist’s approach of later theologians with particular emphasis to the “Pope of the

² Cfr. P. REYNOLDS, *How Marriage became one of the Sacraments: The Sacramental Theology of Marriage from its Medieval Origins to the Council of Trent*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2016, 727.

³ DENZINGER-SCHONMETZER, *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, 1801.

Family”⁴. John Paul II and many others were able to discover that the Christian couples through a faithful living out of their vocations in their daily activities and conjugal relationships are inevitably citizens of heaven. What was the movement like before arriving at a theology of the person or persons in a conjugal relationship?

1.2. From the theology of matrimony to the theology of the person

The sacrament of matrimony or nuptial mystery as far as the Church is concerned, is situated or has its basis on the fundamental human experience. It is an experience proper to man consisting of three intertwining factors of sexual difference, love in its proper sense (relation to the other, gift), and fruitfulness⁵. Because man is a being unto an end, this experience though human has also two dimensions: the horizontal and vertical dimensions⁶. The dual unity of man and woman is the necessary starting point for a description of the phenomenon of the nuptial mystery and this constitutes this mystery’s *horizontal dimension*⁷. There is then, the vertical dimension whereby: “...the nuptial mystery passes through man and woman to the *other* in general, and ultimately to God himself”⁸. This vertical dimension comes to man through the instrumentality of the Holy Spirit, the third person of the divine Trinity (Rm. 5:5). This participation because it comes not with human efforts as such but by docility to the Holy Spirit, shows how the Trinitarian love could be reflected or echoed in the sexual and married love. It is an ability for

⁴ Pope Francis called John Paul II the “Pope of the Family” during his homily on the day of John Paul II’s canonization. “In his own service to the People of God, John Paul II was *the pope of the family*. He himself once said that he wanted to be remembered as the pope of the family. I am particularly happy to point this out as we are in the process of *journeying with families towards the Synod on the family*. It is surely a journey which, from his place in heaven, he guides and sustains”. (27.04.2014) <http://www.usccb.org/about/leadership/holy-see/canonizations-john-xxiii-john-paul-ii.cfm>

⁵ Cfr. JOHN PAUL II, “General Audience, 19th September 1979”, in *Man and Woman He created them: A Theology of the Body*, Boston 2006, nos. 1-3.

⁶ A. SCOLA, *The Nuptial Mystery*, trans. M. K. Borras, Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan/Cambridge, U.K., 2005, xxiii.

⁷ Cfr. SCOLA, *The Nuptial Mystery*, xxiii.

⁸ *Ibid.*

humans in the context of marital relationships to model their love after that of the Trinity which has its root in the Paschal mystery⁹.

These basic doctrines notwithstanding, it is a common fact and accepted by many that for the greater part of history of Christianity, theological reflection on the sacrament of matrimony, its institution, sacramentality and consequent validity has sidelined a proper personalist theological reflections on family, marriage and the individual or persons who constitute the institution and who are by virtue of the very vocation pilgrims making their way to the house of the Father.¹⁰ Christian thought according to Scola, has been at a loss to propose an organic, unified reflection on the person, marriage, and family and consequence is the weakening of the Christian subject, and its consequent inability to combat the progressive shadowing of God's design for these realities¹¹.

From the foregoing and from Scola's submission, it follows that the Christian tradition's discussion of marriage has emerged without a recognition of the necessity of its development into a theory of the family; it even positively precludes such a development¹². It is worthy of note that the pre-personalist periods were not periods of dormancy but times that the Church's theology was always confronted with doctrinal challenges. Scola divided these pre-personalist periods into what he describes as the three phases of the crises of the reception of the nuptial mystery: the ethical crises, the loss of the Christian subject and the abolition of man; what he refers to as the eclipse of fundamental human experience as regards the

⁹Cfr. JOHN PAUL II, General Audience 13th October 1999, in *L' Osservatore Romano*; Weekly English Edition (ORE) 1999 n. 42. P.19 Parr. 3 and 4. Also *The Trinity Embrace: God's saving Plans, A Catechesis on Salvation History*, Boston 2002, 275.

¹⁰Cfr. P. BARBERI- D. TETTAMANZI, *Matrimonio e famiglia nel magistero della Chiesa*, Milan 1986, 15-22. Angelo Scola emphasized this stand very much and explained how it impoverished the Church when demands were made of the personal commitment of married people as regards their vocation in the face of change in ideology and the influx of contraceptives. This we shall see as we progress. Cfr. A. SCOLA, "L' imago Dei e la sessualita umana," in *Anthropotes* 1 (1992) 61-73.

¹¹A. SCOLA, *The Nuptial Mystery*, cit., 193

¹²Cfr. G. ANGELINI, La Chiesa e la Famiglia, in *La Scuola Cattolica* 120 (1992) 467-68.

living out of the sacrament of matrimony¹³. What are the characteristics of these crises?

1.2.1. The ethical crises

The ethical crises period in the sacramental theology of matrimony was occasioned by the contentions of the heresies such as Gnosticism and Manicheism against marriage. They placed marriage in the historical-salvific perspective and majorly condemned marriage because of the sexual acts associated with it. This refusal to see any good in marriage by these heretics precipitated the responses and reflections of the Fathers of the Church and ecclesiastical writers of the first centuries of the Church's life. This scope has the following characteristics, a deep reflection based on their profound knowledge of the Scriptures which explored the theme of Christ and the Church as paradigm of Christian couple according to Pauline Theology in his letter to the Ephesians (Eph. 5:31-32, and Gen. 2:28). In this direction, John Chrysostom compared the deep sleep of Adam from where the Lord created Eve to the death of Christ from which came the Church from his side¹⁴. Tertullian also in explaining the Jewish *tardamah*, explained it in the context of prophetic utterance as God speaking through Adam in welcoming Eve as did Christ for His Church upon resurrection.¹⁵ There was also the reference to the family based on the function of education of children, a pastoral character and dimension emphasizing the moral requirements of the married state bringing out issues like monogamy, indissolubility and fidelity. Again, they considered these also in the light of Christian virginity. Moreover, the era in question proved the goodness of marriage from the theology of creation which was their background for the rebuttal of the heresies against marriage such as Gnosticism and

¹³Cfr. SCOLA, *The Nuptial Mystery*, cit., 198.

¹⁴I said that water and blood symbolized baptism and Holy Eucharist. From the two sacraments the Church is born: from baptism, the cleansing water that gives rebirth and renewal through the Holy Spirit, and from the holy Eucharist. Since the symbols of baptism and the Eucharist flowed from his side, it was from his side that Christ fashioned the Church, as he had fashioned Eve from the side of Adam (J. CHRYSOSTOM, *The Catechesis*, Culled from the Office of Reading, Second Reading of Good Friday.

¹⁵Cfr. AUGUSTINE, *De genesi ad Litteram* (CSEL, 28.1: 294/12-19). Found in REYNOLD, *How Marriage*, cit., 97.

Manicheism¹⁶. Augustine remains one of the significant figures of this epoch¹⁷

The Church Fathers and theologians of this era were trying to prove the morality and goodness of marriage especially in the troubled and charged atmosphere in the midst of many heresies that tried to condemn marriage. It was indeed a time of ethical crises and efforts towards the stabilization of the theology of marriage and the person or persons involved and their vocations to sanctity was not really looked into.

1.2.2. The loss of the Christian subject

The phase comprises of the various but rich theological endeavors and schools of the medieval period, the almost crippling crises of reformation and the doctrinal definition of the council of Trent. Christian thinkers of this extraction covers the period from High Middle ages to sixteenth century¹⁸. There was a shift of emphasis here from marriage as a state of life to marriage as a sacrament occasioned by two important objections raised by some canonists and theologians of the period: First, they questioned the possibility that marriage could confer grace, since grace passes through the passion of Jesus Christ. So that, the passion of Christ is really incompatible with sexual pleasure that is an integral aspect of vocation of marriage. Secondly, given the frequent economic clauses tied to marriages, considering marriage as a sacrament created a risk of simony. With these doubts they denied the sacramentality of Christian marriage¹⁹. The importance of Saint Thomas in this epoch cannot be overemphasized. With a sweeping

¹⁶ibid.

¹⁷In the progression we have traced out, the contribution of Saint Augustine is of particular importance; even today his influence is felt. In combating the Manichean heresy, Jovinian's indifference, and Pelagianism, the bishop of Hippo emphasized three important doctrinal aspects: the original goodness of marriage, the consequences of sin on the matrimonial economy, and the necessity of its redemption by Christ (healing grace). In this context his famous doctrine of the three goods of marriage (*proles, fides, sacramentum*) took shape SCOLA, *The Nuptial Mystery*, cit., 195.

¹⁸Cfr. SCOLA, *The Nuptial Mystery*, cit., 195.

¹⁹Cfr. *Glossa ordinaria Decreti Gratiani*, c. 1, q.1, c. 102 and Hugo of St. Victor, *De Sacramentis*, 2. P.8, c. 8. See also REYNOLD, *How Marriage*, cit., 91.

Concerning the great debate of this epoch especially between Lombard and Gratian.

response he gave a credible account of the Sacramentality of matrimony which the Church could not resist making her own in the council of Florence (1438-45)²⁰. Aquinas responded explaining both the goodness of marriage, its sacramentality and consequently holding that it is a genuine vocation of a Christian²¹.

These objections also formed some of the basis of the claims by the reformers but the council of Trent gave a suiting response as we have seen in our introduction, defining clearly the sacramentality and indissolubility of matrimony²². Prominent theologians and canonists of this epoch include among many others: Peter Lombard, Hugh of St. Victor, Bonaventure, Gratian, Thomas Aquinas and the reformers ably represented by Martin Luther. It was obvious that the concept of the Christian subject and his or her journey or vocation was sidelined in a bid to prove the sacramentality and consequently the ability of matrimony to confer grace on the individuals involved. The significant end of this epoch was the Trent definitions and declarations and their condemnation of the stand of the reformers. Marriage became one of the seven sacraments of the Church²³.

1.2.3. The abolition of man

The third of the phase is 'the abolition of man'. This period stretches from the promulgations of Trent to the emergence of the encyclical *Casti Conubii*²⁴. The aftermath of the reformation had an increasing sense of Nationalism and a visible decline in the secular powers of the Church especially in most European countries and societies. Christian marriage came under serious contentions between the Church and the state on who has the right to administer marriage and with it the concepts of sacrament and contract was also debated²⁵. The point of emphasis of this epoch was oscillating

²⁰Cfr. BARBERI - TETTAMANZI, *Matrimonio e famiglia nel magistero*, cit., 17.

²¹Aquinas response became the fulcrum of classical theology of marriage. "quamvis matrimonium non conformet passioni Christi quantum ad poenam, conformat tamen ei quantum ad caritatem, per quam pro Ecclesia sibi in sponsam coniungendam passus est. AQUINAS, *S.TH. II-IIae q. 100, a.2 ad 6*.

²²Cfr. SCOLA, *The Nuptial Mystery*, cit., 196.

²³Cfr. REYNOLDS, *How Marriage*, cit., 727.

²⁴Pius XI, Encyclical on the Christian Marriage *Casti Connubii*, (31.12.1930). This was the second papal encyclical on Marriage after that of Leo XIII's *Arcanum Divinae Sapientiae*, (10.02.1880)

²⁵Cfr. SCOLA, *The Nuptial Mystery*, cit., 197.

between the themes of the specific nature of the grace of marriage, and the minister of the sacrament. The *Arcanum Divinae Sapientiae* of Leo XIII became the first papal encyclical to be written as regards to Christian marriage where the Pope defined unequivocally the Church's sole ownership and consequent custody of the sacrament thus clarifying what contract and sacrament mean in the context of Christian marriage:

Let no one, then, be deceived by the distinction which some civil jurists have so strongly insisted upon- the distinction, namely, by virtue of which they sever the matrimonial contract from the sacrament, with intent to hand over the contract to the power and will of the rulers of the State, while reserving questions concerning the sacrament to the Church. A distinction, or rather severance of this kind cannot be approved; for certain it is that in Christian marriage the contract is inseparable from the sacrament, and that, for this reason, the contract cannot be true and legitimate without being a sacrament as well. For Christ our Lord added to marriage the dignity of a sacrament; but marriage is the contract itself, whenever that contract is lawfully concluded²⁶.

Casti Conubii of Pius XI, was the second in this regard which reaffirmed the doctrine of Leo XIII regarding the sacramentality of marriage and the Church's sole jurisdiction on the matter. The Church he insists, got this sacred right from her founder and the basis of the doctrine coming from the Sacred Scripture and the Traditions²⁷.

It was obvious from the debate above that the Church's emphasis concerned more the institution, ratification, indissolubility, contract and sacramentality and these obviously excluded any emphasis on the person or persons involved in the sacrament of matrimony and the implications of such vocation on their spiritual lives. Who man is and his transcendental dimension which opens up to the other was entirely left out²⁸. Concluding with Scola and others as we have seen so far, it is clear that from the patristic age to the beginning of the

²⁶LEO XIII, *Arcanum Divinae Sapientiae*, (10.02.1880) n. 23.

²⁷Cfr.PIUS XI, *Casti Conubii*, (31.12.1930) n. 2 and 5.

²⁸Cfr.SCOLA, *The Nuptial Mystery*, cit., 198.

twentieth century, Christian reflection on marriage and family was focused on decisive questions proper to a theology of marriage. Anthropological reflection, such as that on man as person, the impact of the sanctifying grace of the sacrament on him or her, was in fact a presupposition taken. Major concerns especially of canonists was on full consciousness and total freedom which are requisites for consent which makes marriage. As such, “a specific consideration of the family remained substantially marginalized, limited to the theme of children as one of the ends and goods of marriage”²⁹. Why then do we need the personalist principle?

2.0 The challenges of the time and the inevitability of a personalist’s principle

Although a systematic personalist theological reflection was lacking at this point, the three major constituents of matrimony: love, sexuality and procreation still retain their positions in the sacrament. The impact of the sexual revolution on the institution of matrimony and human sexuality in general cannot be overemphasized. The 1960s and 70s saw an unprecedented development that challenged and changed the age long traditional doctrines about human sexuality³⁰. Both in the social and ecclesiastical circles and the confusions were enormous:

The natural circumincession of love, sexuality, and procreation, peacefully accepted for centuries, clashes today with a new state of affairs. The techniques of in vitro fertilization and, even more, the possibility of cloning have opened the path toward a radical separation of sexuality and procreation. The widespread diffusion of a pragmatic mentality, in which preferentialist utilitarianism is coupled with scientific calculation, is more and more imposing a sort of technological imperative: *what we can do, we must do*³¹.

The effect of this development was not only the separation of those constitutive elements of sexuality (person), love (marriage) and

²⁹SCOLA, *The Nuptial Mystery*, cit., 197.

³⁰Cfr. R. VERBRUGGEN, “How the Sexual Revolution Unfolded”, in *National Review* 3 December, 2017.

³¹SCOLA, *The Nuptial Mystery*, cit., 126.

fruitfulness (family) which make up the sacrament but a reductionist attitude that placed sex and human sexuality on purely biological level and made it object of trade that can be got anyhow and anywhere. The markets were flooded with contraceptives and childbearing became one of the proceeds of human technological breakthroughs and not again the gift from God³². In the ongoing impasse, the Church's age-long silence on the person in the context of the sacrament made her grossly incapable to find reasons in explaining the marvelous unity of nuptial mystery and how an individual involved is continuously nourished by the Holy Spirit and will achieve his eternal reward while participating in this sacrament. Of all the candid efforts of the Church to arrest this situation, our point of departure in this work will be the influence from philosophical personalism which contributed much to the discovery of the sacrament of matrimony as a way of the individual sanctity, which was a true reflection on the person, marriage and family³³.

1.1 Philosophical personalism and the concept of adequate Anthropology

One of the efforts to arrest the absence of the person in theological reflections in the sacramental theology of marriage has strong link with the development of philosophical personalism especially in France³⁴. In ethics, philosophical personalism has to do with man striving for moral perfection through his actions. In the context of Christian ethics primarily, it proposes the ideal of personal perfection which man should realize through his actions³⁵. Efforts were made by theologians to integrate this aspect into or to receive this trend of thought into Catholic sacramental theology at a time that the theme of love was at the center of debate between Catholic and protestant theologians. Uses were made of some important texts

³²Cfr. JOHN PAUL II, *Familiaris consortio*, (22.11.1981) n.6.

³³Cfr. SCOLA, *The Nuptial Mystery*, cit., 200. A. Scola made elaborate references to key authors in this direction of philosophical personalism. Among the founders were of French descent Nygren's book; *Eros and Agape*, others are: Rousselot and Geiger. Of much importance also was Max Scheler who influenced Wojtyla greatly in philosophical personalism as regards the concept of love.

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵ Cfr. D. TETTAMANZI, "La famiglia cristiana e la teologia pastorale: bilancio dell'attuale situazione in Italia", *La Scuola Cattolica* 108 (1980), 12-18, also M. SCHELER, *L'idea Cristiana dell'amore*, Rome 1985.

of the time in this regard³⁶. Much impetus was given to the sacrament of matrimony in this dimension by the Second Vatican Council documents especially *Gaudium et spes*³⁷. In this reflection the council made an innovative and balanced use of the categories of person and dignity, signaling a development of the anthropological and theological dimensions of marriage and drawing attention to the idea of interpersonal relationship³⁸. A. Mattheeuws gave a vivid description of the council in this regard:

Among the contributions of the Council, we note particularly the influence of personalist strains and the fruitful employment of the concepts of person and dignity. The guiding thread of the conciliar developments on marriage (Gs. 47, 48, 51) is neither juridical nor institutional. Rather, doctrinal reflection proceeds from a consideration of the person and the spouses, and their actions. The person is a value in itself: more it is at the summit of values in the natural order. The person may not be considered as a means used to obtain some end³⁹.

At the end of the Council a confirmation came from *Humanae vitae*⁴⁰ which took this personalist approach to defend the indissoluble unity between the procreative and unitive meaning of conjugal act and the individual choices and accomplishments of the couples to be guided by God's plan for marriage and family⁴¹. The Polish Cardinal, Karol Wojtyla and the future Pope John Paul II, who wrote his thesis on Marx Scheler was also a significant figure in this regard. The Polish pope has an extra ordinary contribution which helped to situate the theological reflections about matrimony from personalist point of view. This opened up a new horizon in dogmatic reflection on the person in the context of marriage and family thus, an adequate anthropology. The later Popes also

³⁶ Cfr. A. NYGREN, *Eros and Agape*, trans. Philip S. Watson, Philadelphia 1953.

³⁷ See, Vatican Council II, Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et spes* nos. 47-52.

³⁸ Cfr. SCOLA, *The Nuptial Mystery*, cit., 202.

³⁹ A. MATTHEUWS, *Les, "dons" du mariage, Recherche de theologie morale et sacramentelle*, Brusserls, 1996, 9.

⁴⁰ Cfr. PAUL VI, Encyclical on Human Life *Humanae Vitae*, (25.07.1968).

⁴¹ Cfr. D. TETTAMANZI, "La riflessione teologica sull' enciclica "Humanae Vitae" nel dicennario 1968-1978", in Tettamanzi, *I due saranno una carne sola*, Turin 1986, 233-66.

followed this approach: Benedict XVI in *Deus caritas Est*, n.3-8, Francis in *Amoris Laetitia* n.11-17 continuing. The way of sanctity in the sacrament of matrimony came then to be located in what John Paul II calls conjugal charity or chastity⁴². While celebrating the twenty fifth anniversary of the encyclical, *Humanae Vitae*, he wrote the Encyclical *Veritatis Splendour*. It was in this document that the Holy Father explains in clear terms the relationship between moral value of human act and man's final end. This came out very clearly in the Master's dialogue with the young man: the first question in the young man's conversation with Jesus: "What good must I do to have eternal life?" (*Mt 19:6*) immediately brings out *the essential connection between the moral value of an act and man's final end*. Jesus, in his reply, confirms the young man's conviction: that the performance of good acts, commanded by the One who "alone is good", constitutes the indispensable condition or path to eternal blessedness: "If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments" (*Mt 19:17*). Thus, *only the act in conformity with the good can be a path that leads to life*⁴³. This position shows that the promised reward is the principal element and as such the normative indications which stipulate how we are to act is a consequence of the reward: "Acting is morally good when the choices of freedom are *in conformity with man's true good* and thus express the voluntary ordering of the person towards his ultimate end: God himself, the supreme good in whom man finds his full and perfect happiness"⁴⁴. This also apply to the moral experiences of those who are in the married state in the sacrament of matrimony. This according to John Paul II, is within the theological theme of conjugal charity. What then is conjugal charity?

⁴²Scola notes with concern some of the great works of John Paul II which among many include: *The Wednesday Catechesis on the body and love* (September 2, 1979- November 28, 1984), The Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* (November 22, 1981), The Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem* (August 15, 1988), *Redemptoris Mater* (March 25, 1987), The Letter to Women (June 30, 1995). From these also came some other documents to this regard like the *Donum Vitae*, from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith on February 22, 1987, *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* (May 24, 1994) and The Pope's own Encyclical letter *Evangelium Vitae* of March 25, 1995. Cfr. SCOLA, *The Nuptial Mystery*, cit., 208.

⁴³JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Veritatis Splendour*, (06.08.93), n.72.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

2.2 Conjugal charity (chastity)

Charity according to John Paul II, is of much importance in the creation of the new man in the life of a Christian:

Through the power of the Holy Spirit, charity shapes the moral activity of the Christian; it directs and strengthens all other virtues, which build up new man within us. (...) The practice of all the virtues is animated and inspired by charity, which binds everything together in perfect harmony (Col. 3:14); it is the form of the virtues; it articulates and orders them among themselves; it is the source and goal of their Christian practice. Charity upholds and purifies our human ability to love, and raises it to the Supernatural perfection of divine love. All Christians are called to love⁴⁵.

The pontiff also traces and applies this general principle of charity in his teachings about the possibility of human love in marriage being inserted into the circuit of Trinitarian love. In his Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, he situates the sacrament of matrimony as regards human salvation just like every other sacrament in the three dimensions of: memorial, as that which has origin and history, actuation, that which happens in the present, and prophecy, which points to future eschatological encounter which is the meeting with Christ thus, the beatific vision. Clarifying these terms: memorial, actuation and prophecy as regards to matrimony, the pontiff contends that, as a memorial, the sacrament gives them the grace and duty of commemorating the great works of God and of bearing witness to them before their children. As actuation, it gives them the grace and duty of putting into practice in the present, towards each other and their children, the demands of a love which forgives and redeems. While as prophecy, it gives them the grace and duty of living and bearing witness to the hope of the future encounter with Christ⁴⁶. These sacramental acts situate

⁴⁵JOHN PAUL II, General Audience 13th October 1999, in *L' Osservatore Romano*; Weekly English Edition (ORE) 1991 N. 42. P.19 Parr. 3 and 4. Also *The Trinity Embrace: God's saving Plans, A Catechesis on Salvation History*, Boston 2002, 275.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

Christian spouses and their activities not only as reminders of the events of Christ on the Cross, but also as those who are: “for one another and for the children witnesses to the salvation in which the sacrament makes them sharers”⁴⁷.

Charity as a theological virtue is beyond the connatural ability of the individual, instead is a direct effect of the Holy Spirit. This divine gift to man and woman in the sacrament of matrimony begins from their baptism and through the sacrament of matrimony it connects the Christian couples to the events of Christ and the action of the Holy Spirit. Thus, making Christian couples live out the very charity of Christ⁴⁸.

It is from this conjugal charity that John Paul II situates the human sexual love into the circuit of Trinitarian love, thereby establishing a relationship between charity, human love and human practice of virtues. Conjugal charity makes man to love as God loves so that both to himself and to the other, man can declare his or her love. The human person in the state of grace in a spousal relationship can love as God loves since God created human love and all that he made is good (Gen.1:31). Charity according to him, directs all the other virtues and makes man new in his Christian calling or vocation. Charity by this instance, becomes not only the source and goal of Christian practice of the virtues as qualities of the human soul but, the basis and their end which is that inserted in the love of the Trinity. How can this work in the ambient of matrimony?⁴⁹

1. Virtues and demands of matrimony

John Paul II while identifying with the teachings both of the Council and his predecessors contends that:

When there is a question of harmonizing conjugal love with the responsible transmission of life, the moral aspect of any procedure does not depend solely on sincere intentions or on an evaluation of motives. It must be determined by objective standards. These, based on

⁴⁷JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, (22.11.81), no. 13.

⁴⁸Cfr. *Ibid.*

⁴⁹Cfr. A. O'REILLY, “Conjugal Chastity in Pope Wojtyła”, in *A Doctoral Thesis defended at Pontifical University of St. Thomas, Rome 2007*, 195.

the nature of the human person and his or her acts, preserve the full sense of mutual self-giving and human procreation in the context of true love. Such a goal cannot be achieved unless the virtue of conjugal chastity is sincerely practiced⁵⁰.

In our discussions on the virtues and demands of matrimony with regards to conjugal charity or chastity as the pontiff pointed out above, we must take into account the nature of the human person, the spousal meaning of the body and finally the receptions of the fruit of the conjugal love; that is children, which also include the transmission of faith. We may consider only these three and how the attitudes of the Christian couples towards them will be beneficial to them in their journey to salvation.

3.1.The sacrament of matrimony vis-à-vis the nature of the human person

All the sacraments of the Church are real symbols of the salvific event of Christ, but each has its specific character. The first virtue and demand of matrimony according to the teaching of the Church is that it is a natural reality and a communion between two persons who are capable of fulfilling the generative role that takes after that of Christ and the Church⁵¹. “The spouses participate in it as spouses, together, as a couple, so that the first and immediate effect of marriage (*res et sacramentum*) is not supernatural grace itself, but the Christian conjugal bond, a typically Christian communion of two persons because it represents the mystery of Christ's incarnation and the mystery of His covenant”⁵². It is this natural bond between two persons capable of the roles above that the Church can elevate as a sacrament. Consequent upon this premise, it must be between a man and woman according to divine plan for it. This communion is not an end in itself but opens to the *other*, thanks to the natural faculties of the two involved that through an unreserved mutual self-gift, they realize within the institution God's original plan for it and as authenticated by Christ's event⁵³. The specific character of conjugal

⁵⁰JOHN PAUL II, *Familiaris Consortio*, cit., no. 32.

⁵¹ Cfr. JOHN PAUL II, *Theology of the Body*, cit., 45.

⁵²JOHN PAUL II, *Familiaris Consortio*, cit., no. 13.It is obvious as he indicated that this is coming from the *Humanae Vitae* of Paul VI, n. 9.

⁵³Cfr. A. SCOLA, “L' imago Dei e la sessualita umana”, in *Anthropotes* 1 (1992) 61-73.

love in the content of participation in Christ's life involves a totality. It is a totality in which all the elements of the person enter: appeal of the body and instinct, power of feeling and affectivity, aspiration of the spirit and of will. And its aim is that of a deeply personal unity, which is beyond union in one flesh to forming one heart and soul. It demands indissolubility and faithfulness in definitive mutual giving; and inevitably open to fertility⁵⁴.

In effect grace builds on nature. The sacramentality of matrimony and its consequent salvific effects begin with the requisite natural requirements before the grace that is brought about by the Holy Spirit, “In a word it is a question of the normal characteristics of all natural conjugal love, but with a new significance which not only purifies and strengthens them, but raises them to the extent of making them the expression of specifically Christian values”⁵⁵. Before the infusion of the requisite supernatural gift of grace which is the sacramentality, it must first be in its original plan thus: a man and a woman. The specific compositions of man and women in relationship to married love speaks a language. Thus the spousal body has a meaning.

3.2. Spousal meaning of the body

The two bodies in conjugal union have meanings and they speak a language⁵⁶. As we observed above, the age long teaching of the Church that sexuality and procreation are inseparable in the sacrament of matrimony is today under serious attack. This is occasioned by some ideological currents which have not only denied a transcendental configuration to the possible dual unity which creates a communion of persons, but has reduced the whole enterprise to purely biological determinism or reductionism. Thus, seeing all about human sexuality especially in their differences as

⁵⁴Cfr. JOHN PAUL II, *Familiaris Consortio*, cit., no. 13.

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶Cfr. JOHN PAUL II, *Theology of the Body*. This new dimension of theological anthropology as regards married love was the central theme of this work which was a collection of Wednesday Catechesis from 1979 to 1984. The pontiff insists that the human body has a language which has a great transcendental configuration.

mere causes and effects of nature⁵⁷. Added to this unhealthy development is what: "... the technological imperative has insinuated in us all, like a pragmatic doubt apparently full of good sense. This "alleged reason" consists in the practical refusal of all discourse regarding the (ontological) foundation of reality"⁵⁸. This new trend "considers every ontological affirmation to be the undue transposition of a determined state of knowledge about things, always falsifiable, to the level of the essence of things in themselves"⁵⁹. In fact, the nuptial doctrine that links sexuality to procreation becomes one of those insufficiently proven and unclarified assumptions of traditions to this regard. They accuse the Church of making the theme of human sexuality an ontological or theological discuss instead of being subjected to the novelties of philosophical and scientific findings and consequent pragmatic scrutiny in the wake of great cultural revolutions⁶⁰.

But the Church from ages insists on the ontological foundations that link these bodily languages to the divine from where they have their origin. The danger of this separation remains the making of human sexuality a commodity for sale, procreation becomes then as any other technological innovation and this puts in serious question the dignity of the human person as linked to *Imago Dei* founded on the communion of persons⁶¹. The divine persons (*Imago Dei*) have communion based qualities which explain the link and foundation of dual unity: "The loving reciprocity present in that Being who is *Ipsum esse subsistens* gives rise to the third person of the Holy Trinity, the Holy Spirit, who is from eternity identically God with the Father and Son"⁶². It is a communion that has a perfect fruitfulness. So also, the *communio personarum* of man and woman realizes the human person's image of God. In its truth,

⁵⁷Cfr. JOHN PAUL II, *Familiaris Consortio*, cit., no. 6. Also see SCOLA, *The Nuptial Mystery*, cit., 127. The Holy Father pointed out the dangers posed by the various ideological currents each trying to undermine the Church's fundamental doctrines as regards to marriage and family.

⁵⁸SCOLA, *The Nuptial Mystery*, cit., 127

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰Cfr. TETTAMANZI, *La riflessione teologica sull' enciclica "Humane Vitae"*, cit., 239.

⁶¹This among others remains one of the crux of the *Theology of the Body* of the John Paul II as cited above. From pages 42-48 featured this aspect majorly.

⁶²SCOLA, *The Nuptial Mystery*, cit., 132.

human love is this communion between two persons of different sexes which is open to a third person. The child, which is the result of this communion according to the teaching of the Church becomes a gift and not a technological or scientific conquest⁶³.

The spousal meaning of the body for Christian couples as far as conjugal charity is concerned, demands of them an undiluted attention to the language of their bodies in conjugal relationships. J. Noriega, describes this language and its openness to transcendence as destiny of the Eros. While referencing the story of creation, he contends that Adam discovers through Eve the destiny of his being and sexuality⁶⁴. What this means fundamentally is the acceptance of the dual unity not as an end in themselves, but as a communion of persons that has a vocation to fruitfulness. To this accord, the uses of various contraceptives for Christian couples are not acceptable and added to it, the new technological inventions that try to make procreation possible by separating human sexuality from procreation⁶⁵.

The spousal meaning of the body in conjugal love as regards the salvific effect of the sacrament of matrimony recommends that all human sexual attractions, the human *eros* and *agape* have a higher calling and that man can be united to his creator through them. They are paraphernalia for love which goes to God who Himself is love and who calls us to love⁶⁶. Concluding this point, Scola writes: “Separating sexuality and procreation, that is, the unitive and procreative dimensions of the conjugal act, the place in which the communion of persons is expressed through the joining of bodies— is equivalent to under valuating the original, non-derived nature of sexual difference. This alters the man’s ‘face’, both in himself and

⁶³ Cfr. Ibid.

⁶⁴ Cfr. J. NORIEGA, *Il destino dell’eros. Prospettive di morale sessuale*, EDB, Bologna 2006. Noriega situated thus sexual difference as a completion that transcends the two individuals that are joined together in a conjugal love.

⁶⁵ Cfr. JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter, *Evangelium Vitae*, (25.03.95), no. 13. Also this was the concern of the CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF FAITH, Instruction on the Respect for Human Life in its Origin and on the Dignity of Procreation: Replies to certain Questions of the Day *Donum Vitae*, (22.02.1987).

⁶⁶ Cfr. JOHN PAUL II, *Familiaris Consortio*, cit., no. 11.

in his constitutive relation to the other”⁶⁷. This is because: “Only the difference, inasmuch as it expresses an objective openness to fruit (procreative fecundity), indicates the place of the other to love: the “being there” of the man for the woman and vice versa. Without this, the two could not but conceive of themselves (androgynously) as two halves seeking a lost whole”⁶⁸. Fecundity which is the fruit and the sign of conjugal love will then become, not only the incumbent mission which makes the couple the living testimony of the full reciprocal self-giving but also those with ready stout hearts to cooperate with the love of the Creator and the Savior, who through them will enlarge and enrich His own family day by day⁶⁹. The couples’ ability to give faithful testimony to this spousal meaning of the body which is in accordance with the divine plan and properly written in the law of nature, becomes also a way of not only being true to their vocation but also anticipating the inherent reward which is the kingdom of God. Closely related to the spousal meaning of the body is the reception or their dispositions in welcoming the fruit of this conjugal unity; the child.

3.3. Reception of the fruit of conjugal love

In our consideration of Matrimony as a call to holiness, the how of welcoming the fruit of the conjugal love is of utmost importance giving the predicaments of our time and a gradual culture of either total rejection of life, or the desperate dispositions of some couples to get a child at all cost. Reception of the fruit of conjugal love involves also the upbringing of children especially in the Christian faith.

The Church teaches that the first injunction given to the first couple: “God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it” (Gen. 1:28). The implication of this as regards the couples is that, with the creation of man and woman in His own image and likeness, God crowns and brings to perfection the work of His hands. He invites them in a special way to share in

⁶⁷SCOLA, *The Nuptial Mystery*, cit., 129.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹Cfr. JOHN PAUL II, *Familiaris Consortio*, cit., no. 28.

His love and in His power as Creator and Father. The couples carry out this through their free and responsible cooperation in transmitting the gift of human life. The family from the beginning has a divine ordained duty or task to serve life, to actualize in history the original blessing of the Creator—that of transmitting by procreation the divine image from person to person⁷⁰. Be that as it may, the paradox that brings out the mysterious nature of God is seen in this reception of the fruits of this conjugal love. While some through a wrong notion of freedom and a ravaging contraceptive culture and anti-life dispositions reject and openly are against the welcoming of life, there are many others who genuinely and lovely are risking all it takes to beget children. To the first group some of whom even resort to abortion or other inhuman practices, the Church reminds them that the transmission of life is an integral duty of those in married life. While the Church expresses a loving and maternal concern for those who are incapable of begetting children due to circumstances that are not their direct responsibilities⁷¹, she teaches that:

A true and proper right to a child would be contrary to the child's dignity and nature. The child is not an object to which one has a right, nor can he be considered as an object of ownership: rather, a child is a gift, the supreme gift and the most gratuitous gift of marriage, and is a living testimony of the mutual giving of his parents. For this reason, the child has the right, as already mentioned, to be the fruit of the specific act of the conjugal love of his parents; and he also has the right to be respected as a person from the moment of his conception⁷².

This stand of the Church casts a great shadow on the various technological breakthroughs that today make child birth an object of mere biological and scientific cum technological conquest and productions. One considers at this instance practices like: cloning, In-vitro Fertilization (I.V.F), among many others. The Church teaches that, the couples in this condition of infertility can either devote their time for the services of Church and humanity or can

⁷⁰Cfr. JOHN PAUL II, *Familiaris Consortio*, cit., no. 28.

⁷¹ Cfr. CONGREGATION FOR DOCTRINE OF FAITH, *Donum Vitae*, no. 8.

⁷²Ibid.

also become parents through adoption. Adoption of children satisfies both the desire of having children and also is a Christian virtue of Charity where we give home to the often forgotten and abandoned children.

Another important aspect of the welcoming of the fruits of conjugal love has to do with a responsible upbringing of the children, what is normally termed education. According to John Paul II as hinted by Aquinas⁷³ years ago, it is the exclusive right of the parents to educate their children⁷⁴. Of utmost concern today remains the secularistic tendencies that make it impossible for the child to be raised morally and otherwise by the family. This unfortunate situation notwithstanding, upbringing or education of the child remains a duty attached and integral to the parents and the Church is never tired of reminding the parents of such sacred duty. The holiness of married people could also be seen in a diligent upbringing of their children.

⁷³Aquinas explains this: "Secondly, there is in man an inclination to things that pertain to him more specially, according to that nature which he has in common with other animals: and in virtue of this inclination, those things are said to belong to the natural law, which nature has taught to all animals, such as sexual intercourse, education of offspring and so forth". T. AQUINAS, *S.TH.* 1a-11ae, q.94, a.2.

⁷⁴John Paul II emphasizes this in *Familiaris consortio*. The task of giving education is rooted in the primary vocation of married couples to participate in God's creative activity: by begetting in love and for love a new person who has within himself or herself the vocation to growth and development, parents by that very fact take on the task of helping that person effectively to live a fully human life. As the Second Vatican Council recalled, "Since parents have conferred life on their children, they have a most solemn obligation to educate their offspring. Hence, parents must be acknowledged as the first and foremost educators of their children. Their role as educators is so decisive that scarcely anything can compensate for their failure in it. For it devolves on parents to create a family atmosphere so animated with love and reverence for God and others that a well-rounded personal and social development will be fostered among the children. Hence, the family is the first school of those social virtues which every society needs. *Fam. Con.* No.36

Conclusion: All are called to holiness

Although for ages the idea of marriage as a vocation was not emphasized so much until after the Second Vatican Council,⁷⁵ faithful Christian couples are citizens of heaven, all Christians in any state or walk of life are called to the fullness of the Christian life and to the perfection of love. Although the forms and tasks of life are many but holiness is one. Holiness remains that sanctity which is cultivated by all who act under God's Spirit and follow Christ. Obviously within the Church we have many vocations and marriage is one. As a vocation, marriage discloses to man and woman the transcendental meaning of their sexuality⁷⁶. That which reveals God to them as expressed by Benedict XVI⁷⁷. Since vocation provides an orientation to and a context for the use of human freedom, then in the case of marriage it provides these for the free use of the sexual faculty. So that, to describe marriage as avocation, the Church teaches and perennially insists that married life is one specific path or way to holiness⁷⁸. This is made visible by the daily actions that comprise married life which are actions that can lead to holiness through their performance in charity and in accord with the requirements of marriage as divinely instituted⁷⁹. Therefore, the idea of marriage as a vocation qualifies the married state itself with its sacramentality where God's salvific plans are realized. The sanctity of marriage as we have seen basis on the man's ontological nature and state, man's use of his sexual faculty and a true and proper Christian disposition to the reception of the fruit of conjugal love. Our argument remains that Christian couples who are really faithful to the demands of the vocation of matrimony are citizens of heaven.

⁷⁵Cfr. D. ASCI, *The Conjugal Act as Personal Act: A Study of the Catholic Concept of the Conjugal Act in the Light of Christian Anthropology*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco 2002, 77-78.

⁷⁶Cfr. J. NORIEGA, *Il destino dell'eros*.

⁷⁷It was not only John Paul II but Benedict XVI and Francis also emphasized that the sacrament of matrimony remains a way of sanctity. Cfr. BENEDICT. XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, (25.12.2005) and FRANCIS, *Amoris laetitia*, (19.03.2016)

⁷⁸Cfr. C. CAFFARA, "Who is like the Lord our God?" in *Why "Humanae Vitae" was Right*, ed. Janet E. Smith, Ignatius Press, San Francisco 1993.

⁷⁹Cfr. ASCI, *The Conjugal Act as Personal Act*, cit., 79.