

LOVE AND RESPONSIBILITY: A PRECIS

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0. A Catholic Foundation

In order to understand Karol Wojtyła's (KW's) treatise on Love and Responsibility¹ (hereafter LR), it is necessary to know something of the Catholic framework within which he is writing. I believe that this preliminary chapter (my own composition) represents the Catholic tradition necessary as a foundation to his thought.

0.1 The Human Person: Body and Spirit

The human person is composed of a physical body and an inner life. Wojtyła's work (as translated by Willetts) makes use of the term "corporeal" to refer to the external body, and "spiritual" to refer to the inner life.

In Catholic tradition, the human person can be described as "body and spirit".² The normal state of a human person is to be a unity of body and spirit from conception until natural death. Following death, the spirit (or "ghost") alone inhabits heaven, hell or purgatory until the Last Judgment takes place, at which time all persons will be given new bodies by God (the "resurrection of the dead" professed by Christians in their creeds). The spirit is meant to inhabit a body, so the time from death until the resurrection of the dead is something of an aberration. (KW explicitly acknowledges conception as the moment when God gives the spirit to a new human person.³)

Catholic teaching strongly insists on the unity of body and spirit as a whole person, so the pronoun "I" is best applied to that unity. It is wrong to say "I have a spirit", for it is not merely the body speaking; nor is it adequate to say "I inhabit a body", as if the true "I" were the spirit alone.

Clearly in this context the "inner life" of a human person involves the working of the mind, which some contemporary scientists would argue is purely a function of the brain and needs no "spiritual" dimension. Wojtyła's purpose is not to enter into the problem of the relationship between brain-function and spirit, and for the purposes of his discussion it is sufficient to recognise the reality of the "inner life" of a human person, which he insists on calling "spiritual", and which Christian readers will credit with a spiritual dimension.

¹ *Love and Responsibility* (hereafter LR), Karol Wojtyła, translated by H. T. Willetts, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 1993 edition. Polish original 1960, English translation 1981.

² The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (hereafter CCC), 362-368, expresses this teaching but uses the word "soul" to express what I have here called "spirit". I have avoided the word "soul" here since Willetts uses it rarely in his translation.

³ LR 54-55

0.2 The Inner Life: Thought, Feeling and Will

Next, we take a Catholic approach to the components which make up the inner life. St Thomas Aquinas, following St Augustine, recognises three “powers of the soul”, namely memory, intellect and will.⁴ The intellect – the understanding, the cognitive faculty – is that power to reason and understand. It is at work in the process of thought, and in the recognition of what the senses perceive, or what memory recalls. Distinct from the intellect, the WILL is the faculty which makes a decision about what I should do, and what I intend to achieve by so doing.

We also recognise that part of the inner life of a human being is the emotional side, the ability to experience an affective response to what the intellect is currently beholding, and/or to the general state of one’s being.

To appreciate the distinction, ask oneself, “What am I thinking?” and “What am I feeling?”, and notice whether you answer questions by saying “I think...” or “I feel...” – and indeed, note whether you might be calling thoughts, feelings, or vice versa. In Catholic moral theory and spirituality, it is crucial to distinguish thoughts (reasoned judgments) from feelings (emotional responses).

0.3 Morality: Acts and Intentions

Some *actions* are always bad in themselves. These are the so-called “intrinsic evils”.⁵ They include the direct killing of an innocent human being, the deliberate blocking of the fertility of the conjugal act, and the creation of an embryo outside the context of the conjugal act. One may never commit an intrinsic evil for any reason whatsoever.

Some *intentions* can corrupt an action which could in itself be good, e.g. helping someone out of pride in one’s own ability rather than concern for the other person.⁶

The only actions we may morally carry out, are actions which are good in themselves, carried out for one or more good intentions.

Sometimes, actions have foreseeable bad consequences. Such actions may still be carried out (the rule of “double effect”) provided that the bad consequence

- ✓ is not desired for its own sake;
- ✓ is not the means to achieve the good end (i.e. it must be a “side effect”);
- ✓ is preferable to taking no action at all;
- ✓ does not involve commission of an “intrinsically evil act”.

In the case of womb cancer discovered during early pregnancy, if the removal of the womb is an urgent medical necessity, it may be removed for the sake of the mother’s health even though the death of the baby she is carrying is foreseen and inevitable.

In the case of an ectopic pregnancy, an embryo implants in the fallopian tube rather than the womb: if it grows to term, it would rupture the tube and kill the mother. In this case, medical treatment is permissible: but since direct killing of an innocent is

⁴ Aquinas: *Summe Theologiae* I.q79; Augustine: *De Trinitate*, X, 11

⁵ CCC 1755. For additional examples, see the Vatican II document *Gaudium et Spes*, (hereafter GS) 27.

⁶ CCC 1752-1753

intrinsically evil, any technique which directly removes or destroys the embryo is forbidden. The only morally acceptable route is to remove the section of tube which would have ruptured (this is NOT a direct assault on the foetus) even though such an approach is a more dangerous operation for her mother and damages her long term fertility.

It can happen that a morally permissible and “easier” course of action does not give the best witness to Christian values. Christians are called to witness with their lives even when this is difficult, and the Church always commends such “heroic witness”.

For example

- ✓ St Paul rejected eating meat sacrificed to idols, even though he knew idols were false and worthless gods, because his action might lead others astray;⁷
- ✓ St Gianna Molla refused a recommended life-saving operation in order to carry her unborn baby to term, and paid with her life;⁸
- ✓ While Christians may take part in a defensive war under certain circumstances, the Church respects the right of Conscientious Objectors to refuse to fight.⁹

A Christian who refuses to practice heroic virtue does not sin, yet may not be living the Gospel message to the full.

0.4 Love: comradeship, liking, lusting, befriending and betrothing

A treatise entitled “Love and Responsibility” obviously has much to say about love. Here we encounter the poverty of the English language in expressing concepts of “love” which are quite distinct in New Testament Greek, and distinguished by adjectives in Christian Latin. C. S. Lewis’s *The Four Loves* gives a very readable discussion of four Greek terms which we might translate as “love”, though KW focuses on Latin terms which aren’t exactly equivalent to the Greek.

Aspects of love we need to distinguish include:

- ♥ the sense of comradeship experienced in working for a common purpose;
- ♥ the emotional response of liking another person, or something about them;
- ♥ the erotic response to the presence or thought of a sexually attractive person;
- ♥ “being in love” in having a constant sense of attraction to another;
- ♥ the commitment of friendship, of choosing to work for the well-being of another;
- ♥ the life-time commitment to share one’s life with another.

In the Christian tradition, LOVE is a Scriptural commandment. It is not a commandment to have a particular emotional response: these cannot be contrived, only recognised as they arise. The primary sense in which we need to understand the word LOVE is the commitment of friendship, the deliberate choice to work for the true good of the beloved person. In Greek, this is called *agape*. In KW’s work, “love” should always be interpreted in this sense unless the context makes it clear that another reading is required.

⁷ I Cor 8:1-13

⁸ <http://www.gianna.org>

⁹ CCC 2311; GS 79

0.5 The problem of categories

There is an ancient debate in philosophy about whether the starting point for reasoning should be individual specimens, or a species as a whole. We have no difficulty in thinking about species in everyday life: we know what is meant by “a cat” and would recognise one whether it were Siamese, Burmese, Manx or any crossbreed you care to imagine. Plato’s philosophy would posit that cats reflect an abstract (Augustine would say, God-given) “Form” of catness. Aristotle would take an empirical scientific approach and deduce the properties of cats in general from particular examples of cats. But William of Ockham and the Nominalists would argue that there is no such thing as “cats in general”, there is only this cat and that cat. The concept of “cat” is purely an idea devised by humans to help them keep track of similar creatures they experience.¹⁰

The relevance to our current purpose is the division of the human species into Men and Women. There are hard cases, where a few humans do not have the normal characteristics of either gender due to problems in sexual development, a genetic abnormality, or a non-standard set of sex chromosomes. KW acknowledges, but dismisses, the existence of a few hermaphrodites: for him, the existence of two genders is clear despite the hard cases.¹¹ Scripture reinforces this acceptance of categories: “Male and Female God created them”.¹²

Similarly, KW concentrates exclusively on the sexual relationship between a man and a woman. He briefly acknowledges the possibility of attraction in a homosexual, bestial or fetishistic context, but immediately dismisses these as deviations from the norm, and seeks to found his thought only on the “normal” experience.¹³

Summary:

- 0.1: The human person, the “I”, is a unity of body and spirit.
- 0.2: The human inner life includes faculties for remembering (memory), understanding (cognition), choosing (will) and experiencing emotion (affective response).
- 0.3: The only morally permissible acts are those actions which are good in themselves and are performed for good intentions. Bad consequences may be justified by the rule of double effect. Sometimes the best Christian witness is a heroic act beyond a morally permissible compromise.
- 0.4: “Love” in Christian literature should normally be understood as a deliberate choice to promote the well-being of the person loved.
- 0.5: It is meaningful to assert that all human beings are either men or women despite the existence of a few ill-defined examples, and to regard heterosexual relationships as the “normal” human experience.

¹⁰ <http://philosophy.fullcoll.edu/res/profiles/ockham.pdf>

¹¹ LR 47

¹² Gen 1:27

¹³ LR 49 & 105

1. The Person and the Sexual Urge

1.1 Analysis of the Verb, “to use”

21. Our subject matter is human persons. Following Boethius, we can define a person as “an individual being of a rational nature”. [Note that babies, born or pre-born, and comatose patients, have rational *natures* despite being currently unable to frame rational thoughts.] Our starting point is the human person viewed **objectively**, as opposed to my subjective experience of being a human person.
23. Rational persons seek to find knowledge (truth, the ultimate cause of things), and understand what kind of behaviour is good in order to do good. Persons relate to the world using the same senses as animals, but in people, these senses feed their inner life, which is spiritual.
24. Rational beings have free will: the power of self-determination following deliberation. [This is what gives human nature its dignity.] My free will cannot be transferred to another person – it is an inalienable part of my individuality.
25. Consider the verb, “to use”.
A rational AGENT (a person) uses a MEANS to obtain an END.
- 26-28. To make use of another person as a means to obtain an end does not respect the dignity of the other person, unless that other person consents to my action and thereby makes my end also their own end in co-operating. If the other person does consent, our recognition of that end as a common good is a good basis for a mutual relationship. Kant tells us that we should never use another person *merely* as a means to an end.
27. Even God does not use human beings as mere means to His ends; this is why He seeks our free co-operation.
29. LOVE is an act of self-subordination in order to work for the common good. To act lovingly requires a conscious decision, resisting temptation to put one’s own personal ends first.
30. In **marriage** there is a particular danger of using the spouse as a means to an end. Rather, spouses should pursue the common goods of procreation, raising their family, and deepening their spousal relationship.
31. In all interpersonal relationships, there is a duty to love to the extent needed to affirm the human personhood (dignity) of the other.
- 32-33. Objective decisions of the will are often accompanied by emotional responses of pleasure or pain. We may be tempted towards making pleasurable decisions regardless of their objective morality, perhaps by using another person as a means to our own pleasure.
- 35-39. Utilitarianism makes *obtaining pleasure* the highest value. In an ethical system based on utilitarianism, using others for our own pleasure would be legitimate. Two persons in relationship could only pursue mutual pleasure to the extent that they could avoid confronting each other with conflicting desires.

- 38-41. In fact, pleasure is a subjective good, whereas the commandment to love invites us to give the highest priority to the pursuit of an objective common good. A Christian basis for ethics is **personalism**. Here, the highest norm is that a person may not be used as a means to an end, but must always be loved.
43. Christian lovers must always beware of slipping from personalism into utilitarianism, especially in the grip of sexual experiences.
44. St Augustine distinguished an attitude of seeking pleasure for its own sake (*uti*) from finding joy in a totally committed relationship with another person whose goodness you recognise (*frui*).

Summary

A Christian way of life must be based on the Great Commandments of love for God and neighbour. Every person (human and of the Trinity) must be loved, which means that we must always choose the true good of each person. But what is the true good of a human person? Human nature, uniquely among creatures, is to exercise rational self-determination, so the highest good *towards* human beings is to affirm and preserve their capacity for self-determination – that we must do so is the **personalistic norm**. One consequence of this is that we must never use another person merely as a means to an end.

1.2 Interpretation of the Sexual Urge

- 45-47. A natural faculty of human persons is the **sexual urge**. This may be manifested both in physical reflexes of the human body and as a possible direction of action presented to the will. There is no moral culpability attached to un-willed happenings within the body, but there is moral responsibility in every decision made by the will.
- 47-48. There are two human genders. Men and women have different physiological and psychological properties, which complement one another and are mutually desirable.
- 48-49. The sexual urge is always manifested in attraction to another individual. The desirability for the complementary qualities of the opposite gender is merely one aspect of it. Sexual urges towards the same gender (homosexuality) or animals (bestiality) are deviations. A sexual urge can only develop into love where the relationship founded on it is shaped by acts of will.
- 50-51. The sexual urge is responsible for arousal, which is amoral in itself. The urge does not obstruct freedom of the will, but we should will courses of action which help us avoid experiencing arousal in inappropriate circumstances, but rather to exploit our sexual urge in ways consistent with love. The sexual urge is not, of itself, oriented to producing loving relationships. Indeed, in practice, not all loving relationships are sexual, nor are all sexual relationships loving.
- 51-52. **EXISTENCE** is the most fundamental good. Therefore, creating a new human life is the most fundamental act, and is existential. The purpose and proper end of the sexual urge is to ensure preservation of the human species. Its right use is governed by ethics which respect the fact that it gives existence to human persons.
53. Love between a man and a woman is shaped by respecting the fact that each has this urge to create new human persons. A married couple's child is an affirmation and continuation of their love for one another. Rejecting the call to procreation undermines true love.

How is the sexual urge to be interpreted? Here are three schools of thought:

- 54-57. The **Religious Interpretation**: God holds creation in general in being, and has created creatures with the power to beget offspring. In doing so, the sexual urge leads all living things to participate in the work of God the Creator. Humans, the rational animals, are called to make a conscious decision to co-operate in God's creation. He creates a new human spirit whenever a couple conceive a child, and calls them to welcome that new human person. The parents are responsible for education of their children, which nurtures their children's spiritual development. God participates in this process by giving grace. The "order of nature" (which includes the sexual urge) transcends empirical biology because God the creator and sustainer is part of the true nature of all things. This is consistent with what we have set out above.
- 58-61. The **Rigorous Interpretation**: A view in 17th Century England, following empiricism. Pleasure and procreation are distinct ends of the sexual act. Pleasure is bad, but tolerated by necessity since procreation is good and desired by God. [Implicitly, this seems to make the sexual urge a God-given imperative to reproduce without regard to pleasure?] BUT, this is a veiled form of utilitarianism because it makes pleasure a separate end, albeit one not to be sought, and demands a framework in which it is possible to *use* the

spouse for pleasure. [This interpretation teaches that sexual pleasure is a necessary evil tolerable only by double effect, rather than a good which can foster the relationship between spouses.]

62-66. The ***Libidinous Interpretation*** follows Freud in speaking of the “pleasure principle” rather than the sexual urge, and is therefore explicitly utilitarian. Persons seek self-preservation (which is egocentric) and sexual pleasure (which ought to be centred on the spouse and the begotten children, but in this Freudian approach is also warped to becoming egocentric). Combined with Malthusian concerns about population (which represent a genuine call to prudence), this worldview offers us a goal of maximum sexual pleasure with minimum procreation.

66-69. **Catholic teaching** admits 3 ends of marriage: procreation, mutual enjoyment & support, and remedying concupiscence (sexual temptation). The order in which these three things are ranked flows from the dignity of human persons. [Procreation actually creates a human person. Mutual support and enjoyment of the spouse concerns the good of another human person. Finding a legitimate outlet for sexual activity for oneself and one’s spouse is only one aspect of the good.] It is important NOT to designate the second-ranked activity as “mutual love”, for this would give the false impression that begetting a child were not a loving thing to do.

Summary

The sexual urge is part of human beings’ nature, necessary for the preservation of the species [in accord with good evolutionary biology!], an aspect which drives them towards procreation [using the motivation of pleasure]. Since its purpose is to beget new human persons, rational humans must govern it according to the ethics appropriate to the creation of new human persons. The pleasure associated with sex is not evil, rather it is a good to be enjoyed in the proper context. But there is a clear hierarchy in which the moral significance of the sexual act is *first*, that it is oriented to producing a new human person, *secondly* to the mutual enjoyment of two existing human persons, and only *thirdly* to the particular satisfaction of sexual desire.

2. The Person and Love

2.1 Metaphysical Analysis of Love

73. What is love? The word has many meanings, even restricted to the context of relationships between a man and a woman.

74-76. **LOVE AS ATTRACTION** (*amor complacentia*) [compare Greek *philo*] is the response of liking that which is presented to the senses. Something good is recognised as being desirable. The faculty of understanding (cognition) recognises an objective good, and the will chooses that which is desirable. What one finds attractive is determined partly by human nature, partly by external forces which have shaped our development, and partly by the previous choices we have made. For there to be attraction, there must be both good qualities present in the beloved, and a sensitivity to those particular qualities in the one who loves.

77-78. There is also an emotional (affective) response to what is presented to the senses. While our thoughts recognise something objectively good in the beloved, our feelings may draw us towards something good [beauty] or bad [pornography]. Our emotional response may tempt us to see good features which aren't really there. And our first feelings towards a beloved may ebb with time, possibly even being replaced with hatred following disillusionment.

78-80. Beware of asking "am I really attracted to N?" at the expense of pondering "is my relationship with N good?". Beware of focussing on N's most attractive quality: rather, appraise N as a whole person, body and spirit. Is N as a whole person (especially spiritually), good?

80-82. **LOVE AS DESIRE** (*amor concupiscentia*) [compare Greek *eros*] is the wholistic choice "I want you because you are good for me" (as opposed to the utilitarian desire "I want you to fulfil my sexual hunger"). The good lover will be aware of the temptation to utilitarianism and will ensure that "love as desire" does not dominate a loving relationship. Nevertheless, there is room for an element of this kind of love even in our relationships with God.

83-84. **LOVE AS GOODWILL** (*amor benevolentiae*) [compare Greek *agape*] is the longing for the true good of the beloved. Every loving relationship must turn in this direction if it is to mature, but especially marriage because of the danger of using the spouse as a means to an end.

84-86. Can we talk of love existing between two people, or can we only speak separately of each person's love for the other? If I have both desire and goodwill, then I want N because N is good for me, and I also want what is best for N. I desire **reciprocity**, namely that N should love me. This is not selfish, for reciprocated love is a very high good, and is very good for both N and myself!

86-88. Aristotle recognises three kinds of reciprocal relationships: those where each partner seeks pleasure, pursues self-interest, or works for the true good of the other. But a deep relationship requires trust in the other, and how can there be trust of a partner whose motivation is pleasure or self-interest? This is a warning for partners to verify the true nature of a relationship before they make a commitment to one another.

89-94. **SYMPATHY** is an emotional response to the predicament of a loved one. It is not a function of the will, though willed decisions can make me more or less able or available to experience it. My sympathy for N is subjective, but can make me feel close to N, and is a *manifestation* of my love for N. Without sympathy, a friendship becomes emotionally cold. But to cultivate a friendship requires an act of will to work for N's well-being, even when I do not feel warm towards N. A key test of a relationship is to ask to what extent it is based on sympathy. Only a cultivated friendship (of the will) is a sufficient basis for marriage.

94-95. **COMRADESHIP** [compare Greek *storge*] gives a relationship an objective common purpose to pursue a particular end. Two comrades have their wills united in pursuing this purpose. Relationships of comradeship can include more than two people, and can give good experience to prepare individuals for their role in raising a family. Where one person experiences both comradeship and sympathy in a relationship with another, this is a promising basis for cultivating friendship.

96-100. **BETROTHED LOVE** seeks to give oneself to another in a way which runs deeper than the caring for "another self" manifested in friendship. A person cannot physically give their inalienable free will to another person, but morally can surrender totally to another person – a human person, or to God. In such a relationship, two persons mutually surrender to each other. Because the gift is total, it can only be expressed in lifelong monogamy.

99. Due to the psychological differences between men and women, there is a danger that the woman will be more conscious of her submission to her husband than he is of his duty to surrender to his wife. Husbands must carefully guard against regarding their wives as possessions or "conquests", an attitude which would lead to "using" their wives.

96. *Love is always a synthesis of Desire, Attraction and Goodwill.*

Summary – What is love? (things we call "love")

(i) Worthy Christian decisions of the will

Loving attraction: I understand the good in N, and I choose to draw close to this good.

Loving desire (personalistic): I want N, because N (body and spirit) is good for me.

Goodwill: I want to do good for N.

Comradeship: N and I want to work together for the same goal.

Betrothed love: I want to surrender myself totally to N.

(ii) Unworthy decisions of the will

Desire (utilitarian): I want N's body to pleasure me.

(iii) Amoral Affective Responses

Emotional attraction: I feel good when I see N.

Sympathy: I feel close to N when I become aware of N's needs and emotions.

[Further reading: St Anselm's *Spiritual Friendship*]

2.2 Psychological Analysis of Love

101-108. What process takes place when I sense another person?

- a. I SENSE another person, N, using my external senses, or my internal “senses” of memory or imagination.
- b. My “inner picture” of N is filtered by external factors (e.g. lighting) and internal factors (what qualities I am particularly sensitive to).
- c. I may quickly experience in my mind an emotional response to what I sense.
- d. I may also experience an unbidden physical response (arousal) to what I sense.
- e. More slowly, my intellect will recognise good things in what I sense, e.g. physical beauty.

101-104. Emotional responses arise from the values we perceive in the persons we sense.

Because of our sexual urge, we attach particular values to sense-impressions of persons of the opposite sex. We often find deep emotional responses to spiritual values, but our first impressions of another person are based on sense-data which do not reveal much of their inner (spiritual) life.

105-107. **SENSUALITY** is the name KW gives to the combined process of sensing another person and experiencing mental and physical emotional responses (steps a-d above).

The sensual response occurs more quickly than the intellectual response which follows contemplation of the other person, and at worst may impede our ability to form an objective understanding of N. It may also tempt us to evaluate N’s body at the expense of appreciating N as a whole person, corporeal and spiritual.

105-107. Because much of our sensual response is motivated by the sexual urge, it tempts us to consider N as a potential object of enjoyment. The cues which trigger a sensual response are not always signs of sexual vitality in the other. But normally the cues are associated with a human body of the opposite sex because our sexual urge drives us towards procreation.

108-109. Sensuality draws humans towards enjoyment rather than procreation. It is “sub-natural” because human nature is to be rational rather than respond without thought to our emotions. True love must ennoble sensuality with a sense of respect for the whole person rather than for a sexual body.

106 & 109. The sensual response in itself is amoral. Certain forms of artistic or scientific work may expose a person to arousal. This is not a reason to forbid such work, but our arousability serves as a warning that we are easily drawn into a sensual world-view rather than one which respects the whole person. There is in fact a very positive value in the humanity of a person who is easily aroused.

109-113. **SENTIMENT** is the name KW gives to an emotional response to the whole person as a unity of body and spirit. This includes a recognition of masculinity or femininity. Sentiment does not arouse the will, but charms it. Since it is not focussed on the body, it is sometimes called “spiritual love”. It often produces tenderness, and a desire for intimacy and exclusivity. It runs the risk of reading values into the whole person which are not really there, inflating the value of one’s beloved by projecting on to N one’s own ideals. After disillusionment, such sentiment can give way to hatred.

111. Men, by nature, are more susceptible to sensuality, women to sentiment. Where sentiment leads to a close relationship which is emotionally enjoyable, it can easily shift into sensuality. Men will then begin to recognise their own sensual responses, but for women, this may be masked because they continue to perceive the close relationship as a mere sign of affection.

* N.B. KW often uses the term “emotional reaction” to mean a “sentimental reaction”. He does not classify sensual reactions as emotional.

Summary: How do we love?

113. *Sensuality is a mental and physiological response to the corporeal body which is objectively present, especially in men, which fails to respect the inner nature of the person beheld.*

Sentiment is an emotional response to the whole person which seems to be (is subjectively) present, especially in women, which is biased by an idealised rather than a true knowledge of the person beheld.

114-117. *In the light of this, lovers must be careful to make a true appraisal of the whole person of their beloveds. First, lovers must discover the truth about those they love. Only then can they properly exercise their free-will to make the free gift of a loving commitment to another person.*

2.3 Ethical Analysis of Love

- 119-121. We affirm that there are universal norms (including the commandment to love) despite alternative schools of thought which deny universals (e.g. situation ethics). The Gospels command us to love, and present love as a virtue, that is, a good pattern of behaviour which is reinforced and enabled in us the more we practice it. But how can we show that love is a virtue when its highest form, spiritual love, is not open to direct observation?
- 120-124. There are various things we call “love”. *Love as an experience* is manifest in the emotional response and excitement of the senses, which is a response to particular values we sense in a person (e.g. sexual values provoking arousal). *Love as a virtue* is a choice to affirm the value of another human as being a person regardless of any particular values sensed in that individual person. In particular, two responses demanded by this affirmation are the choice of one’s principal vocation in life, and the choice to practice chastity in response to stimulation.
- 125-127. Betrothed love seeks to renounce the autonomy which makes me an individual. This requires an act of will. When two spouses mutually surrender to one another, it is not possible for them to use one another even when enjoying one another. The spouses must recognise the objective good of each other first, make the commitment of betrothal, and only then does sexual intercourse express this completely.
- 127-128. While it is unsafe to found a relationship on sensuality and sentiment, these emotional experiences can cement a relationship, and indeed it is difficult to nurture a marital relationship where these emotional experiences have completely died away. Spouses must always try to weld these experiences to the true value of their spouse as a whole person, lest they become unhealthy eroticism.
- 129-131. One must be aware of the enormous value of oneself and one’s spouse as persons in order to give and receive the gift of self worthily. Any practice of sex without total commitment – even by spouses with one another – is prostitution. No true responsibility for love can be taken without this recognition, for without recognising this value, a relationship is eroticism rather than true love. The more one feels responsible for one’s spouse, the more truly one loves!
131. Choosing a spouse requires a mature and responsible decision. It is automatically a decision to live out the married vocation. One must choose a spouse within which one can discover oneself (who can be regarded as another “I”), else the journey of mutual self-giving is doomed to failure.
- 131-135. What makes two people believe they are compatible? Recognising sexual values in one another (hopefully in each other’s whole being) is important, and may be the starting point of a new relationship, but should not be the primary factor in the final decision. Can the spouses sustain their decision to prioritise the good of one another when emotional responses fade? Can they choose to love their spouse independently of the spouse’s virtues and despite the spouse’s faults? Only if all this is possible can there be a true relationship of betrothed love.
- 136-138. The will of a pure person struggles between satisfying sensual/sentimental desires and making a total gift of self to another person. It is a battle between using the spouse and offering the spouse true friendship.

138. To desire the true good for a spouse is in fact to desire God for the spouse, but only a few spiritually advanced people recognise this explicitly.

138. The discovery that I can will good for my beloved shows me that I am capable of choosing something good!

139-140. How can this be applied to everyday life? Love as an emotion arises unbidden, but living out love requires us to be “educated for love”. Only in this way can we love truly and prevent relationship breakdown. We should believe that God wants to be at work in our human love, and straighten our tortuous paths!

Summary: How should we love?

Love is a virtue. We need to be educated about how to practice it well, and believe that God wants to give us grace to love worthily!

Choosing a spouse is a decision to live out the married vocation. One must choose a spouse with whom one hopes to succeed in a journey of mutual self-giving. Sexual attraction may be a starting point but is not a sufficient basis for marriage. Only if both spouses are willing to choose the good of one another when their emotional responses fade, and love independently of the spouse’s virtues and despite the spouse’s faults, can there be a true relationship of betrothed love.

It is only safe and good to have sex with someone who has made a life-long and total commitment to place your well-being above their own, and when you have made a similar selfless life-long surrender in favour of your sexual partner’s well-being. Anything less means that one of you is using the other for pleasure, and that is beneath the dignity of human beings. One must be aware of the enormous value of oneself and one’s spouse as persons in order to give and receive the gift of self worthily.

3. The Person and Chastity

3.1 The Rehabilitation of Chastity

143. Chastity requires a firm act of will. There is a danger that instead of being welcomed as a virtuous way of life, chastity may be resented as a path which ought to be followed but demands too much effort of us.
144. Claims have been made that chastity is harmful to health or impedes love.
- 145-147. Responsible loving requires “integration”. This means: living out love in a way which always clearly preserves the value of the whole person who is beloved. Erotic experiences based on sensuality or sentiment can draw us into a dis-integrated “love” based on emotional exuberance alone. Chaste (clean) loving shuns erotic experiences incompatible with the total value of the human person.
147. In what follows, “actions” includes inner actions of the person (e.g. coveting) as well as physical or external actions.
- 148-151. We have already defined sensuality as the reaction to the sensing of sexual values in a human body. This often leads to “sensual concupiscence”, a spontaneous reaction in which a person develops an appetite for experiencing those values. This in turn may lead to carnal desire: a conscious hunger for encountering a sexual body. This tempts the will to choose an experience of a sexual body to derive enjoyment. But as soon as the desire is fulfilled, it is “expended” and interest in the sexual body is lost, until desire arises again at some later time. This carries a grave moral danger of using someone’s sexual body as a mean to enjoyment. A sensual relationship which only seeks mutual satisfaction of carnal desire is not worthy of the name, “love”.
- 151-153. Sentiment is an emotional reaction to another person as a whole, not merely their sexual body; it carries the risk of idealizing another person. It can serve as a safeguard against sensuality, but at worst, it can decorate a relationship based on sensuality. At best, it can help foster the development of practicing chastity.
- 153-158. Responsible loving requires use of the will to shape emotional responses in a direction which respects the value of the human person as a whole. Love without emotion is sterile. Basing a course of action on “feeling good”, or pursuing “authenticity of feeling” without objectivity, however, will not lead to an objectively good relationship; rather, this course leads to hedonism, and is one of the ways in which utilitarianism corrupts love.
- 159-161. Concupiscence is not in itself sinful, but since it tempts us to regard another person as “a sexual body, a source of enjoyment”, it contains a “germ of sin”. Theology finds a cause for concupiscence in original sin.
- 161-162. Sin only occurs when the will makes a decision against what is good. Physical arousal and the unsought stirring up of desires to enjoy another’s body are not sinful. The threshold is crossed when the will acquiesces to the desires presented by concupiscence: abandonment of resistance is sinful as well as active encouragement. On the other hand, a willed act of resistance will not normally succeed in suppressing a sensual experience, which runs a natural course.

- 163-166. “Sinful love” occurs when respect for the whole person and true love are subordinated to the gratification of the emotions rather than *vice versa*. Even a “moment of weakness of the will” results from the will choosing pleasure above righteousness. Before objective reflection, erotic experiences deceive the partners into thinking that they are truly loving one another (and this mitigates the gravity of the sin); objective reflection will reveal the true nature of the relationship.
- 166-169. The Gospel and Greek philosophy recognise the call to “be perfect”. Part of the virtuous life is the practice of *moderation*, i.e. of the will resisting one’s instinctive appetites in accord with what is truly good. The ability to moderate an appetite only *sometimes* does not constitute virtue: the virtuous person is *consistent* in the practice of moderation.
169. Is chastity best regarded as a subspecies of moderation, or in the context of love? Since the role of chastity is to free love from utilitarian attitudes, it is best regarded as an aspect of the virtue of love.
- 170-171. There is a danger that deep-rooted utilitarian attitudes may be camouflaged rather than swept away. Treating chastity as merely the duty to repress sensuality and sentiment, as one long “no”, may store impulses in the subconscious until they explode out. Rather, chastity is a “yes” which requires some “no” decisions as a consequence. Chastity does not seek to deny the values recognised in a sexual body, but rather invites a positive effort to discern the higher value of the whole person who is manifested by that body.
- 172-173. Growth in chastity takes time. It is a long term matter for human persons to rise above concupiscence and learn to savour chaste loving. The greatness of the human person – of oneself and of others – requires a response of humility.

Summary: Why the virtue of chastity is needed

Human persons experience “sensual concupiscence”, a spontaneous reaction in which a person develops an appetite for sensual experiences. This in turn may lead to carnal desire: a conscious hunger for encountering a sexual body. These tempt the will to choose an experience of a sexual body to derive enjoyment. Physical arousal and the unsought stirring up of desires to enjoy another’s body are not sinful; and even an act of will cannot suppress these immediately. The threshold of sin is crossed when the will acquiesces to the desires presented by concupiscence: abandonment of resistance is sinful as well as active encouragement. Responsible loving requires use of the will to shape emotional responses in a direction which respects the value of the human person as a whole. Chastity is best understood as part of the virtue of love, which seeks to respect the high value of the whole person, rather than as part of the virtue of moderation which regulates sexual experiences.

3.2 The Metaphysics of Shame

- 174-175. **SHAME** arises when an act which ought to be private (because of its very nature, or because of the underlying intention) becomes public. It is distinct from fear, though there is a corresponding fear that a shameful act will become public. Shame is only possible because persons have an inner life which is not public.
- 175-176. One widespread form of shame is associated with physical display of the sexual parts of the human body. It is not identical with nakedness: tropical cultures may go unclad for practical reasons, while clothing can emphasise as well as hide the sexual parts of the body. An essential feature of attitude to dress is the realisation that one's body can be an object of sensual enjoyment by others.
- 176-177. Since men are, in general, more susceptible to sensual arousal, there is a greater duty on women to conceal the sexual cues which arouse men. Yet since women are less susceptible to sensual arousal, they may not naturally appreciate the importance of doing so.
176. Sometimes it is said that woman is "purer" than man. This does not make woman more chaste, but is a recognition that a woman's predisposition to sentiment (contrasted with the man's predisposition to sensuality) leads woman more than man to a natural appreciation of the human person as a whole.
177. Men are more aware of their sensual susceptibility, and their shame is primarily a desire to conceal their sensual reactions, and the very fact that they react sensually. They also may be more conscious of their own bodies in a way which leads them to conceal them.
178. The feeling of shame arises from an understanding that a human body (one's own or another's) ought not be used as a mere means to enjoyment.
179. Despite their sense of shame, persons (especially women) desire to inspire others to love them so that they can have a spouse to love, and also desire (especially men), to attract a partner so that oneself can be a beloved and secure spouse. Concealing one's sexual body helps ensure that this love is found in a relationship which appreciates the spouse as a whole person. Modest (shame-sensitive) dress in fact signals this understanding of the value of the whole person.
180. There is a certain fear of contact between those who love one another: for the woman, expressed as "you must not touch me, not even in your carnal thoughts", and for the man, "I must not touch her, lest she become a means to my sensual enjoyment".
- 180-181. Acts of intimacy between a couple, especially sexual intercourse, also take place in private, on pain of shame. Only the right dispositions of the inner life of each spouse makes the external activity morally right; observers could only regard the external acts without entering into the real relationship. The acts must therefore be concealed, in order to safeguard the immense value of good and wholistic sex . [Presumably this can be applied to intimate relations less than sexual intercourse: The more intimate the act, the more privacy it requires.]

181-184. Spouses, however, can be “naked without shame” in each other’s presence: true love absorbs the need for shame, and gives the spouses the right to witness each other’s sensual reactions. The shame is not lost, however, for proper “absorption” means that the lovers retain a sense that what they are doing would not be legitimate without a commitment to one another as whole persons. Nor is it shameful for your spouse to know that you enjoy sex, within the proper context.

185-186. There is a danger that shame may be absorbed not by betrothed love, but by mere amorous emotion; and the defence of shame is then lost in the temptation to sexual relationships outside marriage. Cultural pressures may also mitigate against modest behaviour: education for appropriate modesty is needed.

187-188. Let us distinguish physical shame (concealing the body lest it be “used” for someone’s enjoyment) from emotional shame (concealing feelings and reactions which betray one’s sensual response). There are corresponding forms of shamelessness: flaunting the body in a way that obscures the value of the whole person, and rejecting one’s natural resistance to “using” sensual experiences.

188. **Prudery**, by contrast, is an attitude of concealing true intentions concerning sex, e.g. by condemning all manifestations of sexuality.

189. It is difficult to provide an absolute description of what is shameless. A woman may dress in a way she considers modest, yet a man may consider her appearance an expression of physical shamelessness. Conversely, a man may have unrestrained feelings (emotional shamelessness) towards a woman even though she has done nothing provocative. Men and women must both recognise that it is easier to behave in a way which appears shameless to the opposite sex, than they may be conscious of. Healthy customs must be developed which respect this.

189-192. What constitutes modest dress? This is hard to define, though any form of dress designed to accentuate one’s sexual body to the extent that it would obscure a vision of yourself as a whole person is necessarily immodest. Partial nudity is appropriate in certain contexts: bathing places, physical labour, medical examinations, etc.

192-193. Art has a responsibility to represent the whole truth of its subject matter, and sexual relationships have always been an important subject matter for art. In pornography, there is a deliberate distortion to emphasise the sensual aspects at the expense of conveying something of the relationship between persons.

Summary: What is shame?

Human persons must never be used as means to an end, especially as a means to enjoyment. When one becomes aware that one's own body may be a means to another's pleasure, or that one is taking pleasure in another's body, this awareness results in **shame**: physical shame at one's own body, emotional shame at one's reactions. Efforts to minimise cause for shame constitute **modesty**. Since men are more susceptible to sensual arousal, they experience more emotional shame, and women especially experience physical shame because of men's possible reaction to them. The practice of modesty is a signal that one wishes to relate on the basis of valuing the whole person. **Prudery**, by contrast, is a puritanical attitude that all manifestation of sexuality are wrong.

Men and women must both recognise that it is easier to behave in a way which appears shameless to the opposite sex, than they may be conscious of. Modest dress is so dependent on culture that it hard to define, though any form of dress designed to accentuate one's sexual body to the extent that it would obscure a vision of yourself as a whole person is necessarily immodest. Nudity is acceptable in art as long as the artist seeks to convey the whole truth about human relationships rather than accentuating the sensual aspects.

For a married couple, shame is absorbed into a sense of the value of one another as persons, which legitimates their enjoyment of one another in marital intercourse. No third party can share in this emotionally, so shame demands that the marital act takes place in private.

3.3 The Problems of Continence

194-196. One who seeks to do what is morally right must exercise self-control in the face of concupiscence. Human dignity demands that the will should not surrender to strong forces impinging upon it. Rather, moderation demands that we regulate our response to the level which is most loving, i.e. seeks the best for the beloved and the relationship concerned. It is part of human nature that persons are susceptible to sentiment, and can be excited by sensual experiences; though there is a range such that some persons are highly excitable, and others can hardly be aroused at all. To have a naturally weak response is not the same as being moderate!

197-199. Continence is not an end in itself: we are not called to blind restraint. Rather, we are called to a vision dominated by the value of the human person as a person. The virtue of chastity is only present where continence is practiced because of an understanding of this vision. Will-power may appear to be able to suppress the promptings on concupiscence, but these promptings will only truly die as the objective value of the human person is internalised over the long term; and only this wonderful vision can avert a sense of loss over what has been suppressed.

199-200. An abstract, intellectual understanding of the value of human persons is not sufficient: this value must be *felt*. Here, the power of sentiment [to idealise?] might be harnessed. Often, people naturally have a sentimental idea of their ideal man or ideal woman: this could be sublimated into their ideal person.

200-203. **TENDERNESS** arises from the capacity to empathise with another person (or, in an analogous way, a thing or animal); whoever feels tender attempts to convey a sense of empathy and closeness to the object of the tenderness. It is borne of sentiment and seeks to fulfil not sensual desires, but the desire to be close to another person (of the opposite sex). Unlike sensuality, tenderness may be totally disinterested (though there is room for a certain degree of “self-interest” in love which seeks reciprocity).

203. The physical or verbal expression of tenderness may provoke a sensual reaction, so self-control is necessary in order to express tenderness safely.

204. Particularly vulnerable persons have a “right” to receive tenderness. Everyone has a right to exercise tenderness, but this must be combined with a certain firmness, lest it becomes self-serving in fulfilling one’s own egoistic sentiments.

205-206. Courting couples must be particularly firm, for they will often find that their sensual and sentimental relationship matures faster than their wilful commitment to act for each other’s true good. At worst, premature tenderness can obstruct the cultivation of true love.

207. A woman has a very rich emotional life, and in marriage has a right to expect her husband to empathise with the depths of what she is experiencing. Husbands also deserve tender empathy, but their need for it is not so pronounced.

207-208. An educated tenderness requires continence.

Summary: on continence

Chastity, we have seen, is a choice to love in accordance with an understanding of the total value of the human person. Will-power may appear able to suppress the promptings of concupiscence, but these promptings will only truly die – and the sense of bereavement diminish – as the objective value of the human person is internalised (emotionally as well as intellectually) over the long term.

Tenderness towards another person can be expressed with total disinterest, but self-control is necessary in order to express tenderness safely. Courting couples must be particularly firm, since premature tenderness can obstruct the cultivation of true love. A wife has a right to expect her husband to empathise with the depths of what she is experiencing: he needs a conscious appreciation of the depth of a woman’s emotional life in order to achieve this.

4. Justice Towards the Creator

4.1 Marriage

211. The principle of marriage being monogamous and indissoluble follows from the personalistic norm: such a marriage is the only context where spouses may enjoy sexual relations without either being used as a means to an end.
212. Marriage only endures as long as the bodies of both spouses exist on earth. Scripture affirms the legitimacy of widow(er)s remarrying, while praising the witness of those who do not marry again as a testimony to the value of the deceased spouse.
- 213-214. Jesus affirmed monogamous and indissoluble marriage (the vision of the creation story in Genesis) against the divorce and polygamy of Old Testament practice: this is consistent with His commandment of love.
- 214-216. While separation may be necessary in “failing” marriages, especially where one spouse is unfaithful, the spouses remain objectively joined in wedlock. This remains true even when subjective ties between the spouses fail. Therefore a couple should not marry until their relationship has matured to the point where they can appreciate the objective commitment.
- 216-219. Marriage is an institution (*i.e.* something established according to norms of justice) and exists in a social framework. Normally it is the basis of the founding of a family, which is the fundamental building block of any society. Nevertheless, the marriage of the spouses is distinct from the wider network of relationships which constitutes a family. Inability to bear progeny does not deprive marriage of its dignity as an institution.
- 219-220. Spouses will find that there is something lacking in their relationship unless society respects their identity as a couple. Some form of ritual is always needed to mark the start of this as a social institution.
- 220-222. While a man *may* be used in a relationship, conjugal relations outside marriage *always* constitute use of the woman by the man – even when the woman has freely consented.
- 222-224. Since God is Creator, all persons are in a sense His property. If in marriage, a couple pledge to “belong” to one another, this must be done in a way just to God, their ultimate owner. So a marriage must be a religious ceremony in the sight of God, respecting His ways.
- 224-228. Marriage legitimates sexual intercourse, and indeed this is a vital element for deepening the relationship of the spouses. Nevertheless, each and every individual conjugal act must be carried out justly. Spouses are responsible for each other’s life and health, and must always respect the personalistic norm; and we saw early that every act of conjugal intercourse must be respected for the fact it could bring a new human person into existence. Not only must the potential new life be respected, but the potential to become a parent is part of the immense value of each spouse.

- 229-230. The proper way to utilise the sexual urge is to make use of it for its proper purpose, but to resist it when it threatens to make another person an object of use.
- 230-232. Shame, and its absorption within marriage, protects the procreative aspect of intercourse. If contraception is employed, intercourse becomes shameless. Women especially may feel ashamed by the possibility of rejecting new life. Against the shame of using contraception is set the fear of the demands which a new child will bring – for a child is often received as a burden as well as a blessing. The correct response to the legitimate fear of having a child is continence within marriage.
- 232-234. What is parenthood *in potentia*? Clearly not every conjugal act of a fertile couple will result in procreation, and it would be impractical to insist that it must. Human ingenuity can work out the cycles which make procreation more or less likely. Indeed, insisting that conjugal intercourse **must** produce offspring is itself a utilitarian attitude, using the spouses as a means to procreation. Rather, intercourse must always be an expression of mutual love. When the couple have sex, they should focus first of all on what is best for each other, not primarily on “we must beget a child”. Nevertheless, their attitude should always be the willingness to receive the gift of a child if one should be conceived.
- 234-236. Deliberately frustrating the possibility of procreation makes the act of intercourse one which is exclusively oriented to pleasure. Infertility *per se* does not make marital intercourse illicit: only when one wilfully excludes procreation has one made the moral shift to pleasure-seeking.
- 237-238. During marriage, if either partner is currently unwilling to beget a child, or there are circumstances which make it imperative no procreation takes place, then the only noble solution is continence. Continence becomes especially difficult when the spouses have become accustomed to sexual relations.
- 238-239. Malthusian concerns and the phenomenon of working mothers mitigate against large families, and tempt us into a contraceptive mentality.
- 240-241. Periodic continence does not contradict the personalistic norm, for it respects the Creator’s design of the natural human fertility cycle. It also calls for a particularly virtuous mindset on the part of both spouses, which is part of true love for one another.
242. If periodic continence is to be practiced virtuously, it must not be used exclusively to minimise the possibility of procreation, for this too would betray an unwillingness to accept the call to parenthood.
- 242-244. In general, a healthy family which can live as a community benefits from including more than two children. In particular circumstances, however, concern for the well-being of one’s family may demand limiting the number of children – while accepting and welcoming any nevertheless conceived unexpectedly.

Summary: Marriage

The basis of marriage is the personalistic norm: this demands that marriage be monogamous and indissoluble, and makes a heroic virtue, though not a moral necessity, out of not remarrying after the death of a spouse. A ritual is needed to justly establish a marriage in the sight of the community and of God (for the two spouses who purport to give themselves to one another are His property).

In order for the conjugal act to avoid being a mere use of one's spouse, it must never be carried out for the sole purpose of pleasure, nor the sole purpose of procreation. It always requires a total act of loving self-giving accompanied a willingness (though not always a positive desire) to become parents through the act. Awareness of the God-given natural cycle makes canny periodic continence possible; this does not involve a pleasure-seeking attitude unless continence is used persistently to avoid procreation. Regulation of conception is part of responsible parenthood. But any artificial method of contraception automatically indicates a pleasure-seeking mentality.

4.2 Vocation

245-249. God the Creator has revealed that His attitude to persons is one of love. True "religion", in the proper sense of the word, consists in doing for God the duties he justly deserves from us. By understanding the rules of God's creation, humans are able to choose to participate in God's work. We indirectly honour God when we treat his creatures rightly, and the highest form of this is to obey the personalistic norm. The norm must be obeyed in matters of relationships between men and women, and we have already expounded the consequences of this.

249 Humans cannot be totally just in what they render to God, for the creature can never be equal to the Creator. Christ shows us the path of loving God, of seeking a relationship and union with God: this goes beyond justice.

249-252. Virginité is a metaphysical (ontological) reality in both men and women, which also has a physical expression in a woman's body. It is the reality of not having surrendered one's very self to another human person. Mystical virginité occurs, under the prompting of grace, when a person makes a life-commitment not to surrender to a spouse, but only to surrender directly to God alone.

252. Physical virginité of itself is not spiritual virginité; the latter requires an act of will towards God. Celibacy – understood as abstention from marriage – similarly is not automatically spiritual, and may be undertaken for practical or medical reasons. Priestly celibacy is a mixed phenomenon: partly practical to enable freedom to do God's work, the dignity of priesthood ideally asks for spiritual virginité but can also be bestowed on those who are (or have been) married.

252-253. It is possible that one may only reach the spiritual maturity of wishing to make a life-surrender to God after one is no longer physically a virgin. Alternatively, if one has “failed” to make the life commitment of marriage, can one give to God what one has failed to give to a spouse? The whole of human life is a quest for God, so both of these routes are possible.

253-255. Marriage is not a denial of one’s ultimate destiny for union with God. Marriage only lasts during our earthly existence, and God will be our fulfilment in eternity. Virginity is not to be seen as “more spiritual” a state than marriage, for a true marriage must be a spiritual as well as physical commitment. Rather, the excellence of virginity is that those who choose virginity for God’s sake on Earth take a step towards God earlier, and give a particular witness to our eternal destiny.

255-257. A vocation is a rational commitment to a way of life: only persons can have vocations. There is a proper course for each person to follow, based on an understanding of one’s own resources and society’s expectations of oneself. This course, once plotted, demands a wholehearted commitment. This too demands self-giving – an act of love. Only personalism gives meaning to vocation, and to virginity.

257-258. In the light of the New Testament, a vocation is not only a response to one’s gifting, but a call by the Giver of Gifts. The vowed state of poverty, chastity and obedience provides a particularly favourable environment for the attainment of Christian perfection, but achieving this perfection flows primarily from how one loves.

258-261. While a woman usually experiences a natural desire for motherhood, a man may need to deliberately cultivate an attitude of true fatherhood. Spiritually, parenthood involves not only the moment of physical procreation, but the ongoing “procreation” of the child through education; and in the latter task, the roles of mother and father are less distinct. All parenthood reflects God’s parenthood, and this includes other relationships, as a priest has with his people, or a teacher with pupils.

Summary: Vocation

All people are called to recognise God as Lord and Creator, to whom they must ultimately surrender. Spiritual Virginity is the deliberate choice to make this surrender to the degree which excludes the mutual surrender of a marital relationship. Since marriage only lasts until bodily death, however, it does not prevent one’s *ultimate* total surrender to God. Each person must reflect on their own gifts, their place in society and relationship with God, and so discern their vocation in life. Once chosen, pursuing this path is a commitment made with love. Spiritual Parenthood – the giving of spiritual nurture and education – reflects God’s parenthood and is primarily but not exclusively the role of physical parents.

5. Sexology and Ethics

5.1 A Supplementary Survey

265-267. **Sexual Morality** requires a treatment not of “the body and sex”, but also of the relationship between man and woman. “Sexology”, if reduced to the study only of the body and sex, or a medical discipline which promotes good bodily health, is inadequate to address moral questions, since it excludes the relational aspects of “the good” which are essential in a personalistic framework.

268-270. The **Sexual Urge** is first consciously experienced at puberty and reaches its climax in middle age. The physiology of sexual stimulation and reflex is summarised.

270-274. Anatomically, a man must be conscious and wilful for sexual intercourse to take place, while a woman could be a passive recipient. Female arousal is a process which grows and diminishes more slowly than in a man. Since there is a moral requirement than the woman be fully involved, this requires considerable restraint and self-control on the part of the man. If a woman is not brought to orgasm and so to natural detumescence, there will be negative consequences both physiological (genital inflammation) and psychological (frigidity resulting from repeated lack of satisfaction). Feigning orgasm is counterproductive if a long-term trusting sexual relationship is to be maintained.

274-276. It is clear, then, that what is needed is not so much training in technique (which can destroy natural, spontaneous sex) as the fostering of a “culture of marital relations”, a culture in which mutual understanding, borne of education and a relationship of trust and good communication, comes naturally. The man must learn to offer his wife expressions of tenderness for the onset and decline of her arousal.

276-278. Does science support the excellence of chastity and monogamy? There are psychological and physiological consequences of breaking these principles: guilty conscience (with its knock-on effects), risk of pregnancy, and sexually transmitted diseases. But science cannot establish the necessity of these norms. Statistics show that pre-marital cohabitation is not a good indicator of marital stability. Science does offer advice about combinations who should not marry on the grounds of likely genetic consequences.

278-285. Artificial methods of birth control are not morally acceptable, and furthermore, most are likely to damage a woman chemically or physically. Inserting barriers destroys the spontaneity of the sexual act; *coitus interruptus* robs a woman of detumescence with the consequences noted above. Ethically acceptable methods require a woman to have knowledge of her natural cycle; since this can be disrupted by neuroses, and even by the fear of becoming pregnant, a harmonious marital relationship is essential. Abortion can also lead to neuroses which upset future cycles. In practicing periodic continence, it is acknowledged that the man shoulders much of the responsibility, and that the wife must exercise restraint precisely at the point in her cycle when she is most arousable.

285-286. There is no medical evidence that long-term abstinence from sexual activity is harmful. Failure to accept and integrate one’s own sexual urges, or to recognise the nature of involuntary reactions, may be psychologically harmful – suitable education is needed to forestall this.

286-287. Certain principles should be remembered, and communicated where appropriate, by psychotherapists:

- a) Sexual acts are not intrinsically “dirty” but morally neutral.
- b) Men’s sexual reactions are not totally independent of their will; they must train their own bodies.
- c) Young people need the timely provision of appropriate information, lest sex be elevated apart from all other dimensions of human experience.
- d) People need to be reminded that there is a hierarchy of moral values, and sexuality has its proper place in this hierarchy.
- e) Therapists need to work from a personalistic conception of what is truly good for patients, not pursue “the perfect orgasm”.

287-288. Those affected by some sexual deviation or illness are less capable of “love and responsibility”; appropriate therapy seeks to restore this capacity, and inculcate a right vision of the dignity of the human person.

Summary: lessons for and from medicine

Medicine’s intrinsic conception of “the good” is to restore health. But an ethical concept of the good touches the fullness of relationships. Therapists need to work in a paradigm where sexual activity is morally neutral, but personalism indicates where the true good lies.

Natural methods of fertility regulation depend on the woman’s knowledge of her cycle. Psychological stresses can disrupt this, so a mutually self-sacrificing low-stress marital relationship is essential. Marriage benefits from building up a culture within which both partners seek to understand the other spouse’s experience of sex.

Medical evidence indicates that if a woman is not brought fully to orgasm and sustained afterwards by tenderness, there may be negative consequences both physiological (genital inflammation) and psychological (frigidity resulting from repeated lack of satisfaction). This calls for generosity on the man’s part, since his arousal cycle is more rapid. It does not help the long-term relationship if the wife regularly fakes orgasm.

This précis is not a substitute for reading the full text of Wojtyla’s work.

For further information on this document, please see:
<http://www.ox.compsoc.net/~leyshon/LR>