

Catholic Teaching on Marriage, Married Love and Responsible Parenthood

...the nature of marriage

God Himself is the author of marriage, endowed as it is with various benefits and purposes. All of these have a very decisive bearing on the continuation of the human race, on the personal development and eternal destiny of the individual members of a family, and on the dignity, stability, peace and prosperity of the family itself and of human society as a whole. (The Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et spes*, no. 48)

By their very nature, the institution of matrimony itself and conjugal love are ordained for the procreation and education of children, and find in them their ultimate crown. (The Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et spes*, no. 48)

Marriage is not, then, the effect of chance or the product of evolution of unconscious natural forces; it is the wise institution of the Creator to realize in mankind His design of love. (*Humanae vitae*, no. 8)

Marriage is more than a civil contract; it is a lifelong covenant of love between a man and a woman. It is an intimate partnership in which husbands and wives learn to give and receive love unselfishly, and then teach their children to do so as well. Christian marriage in particular is a “great mystery,” a sign of love between Christ and His Church (Eph 5:32). (*Married Love and the Gift of Life*, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2006, p. 3)

The Church speaks of an inseparable connection between the two ends of marriage: the good of the spouses themselves as well as the procreation of children. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches that “these two meanings or values of marriage cannot be separated without altering the couple’s spiritual life and compromising the goods of marriage and the future of the family.” This inseparability arises from the very nature of conjugal love, a love that “stands under the twofold obligation of fidelity and fecundity.” (See, *Marriage: Love and Life in the Divine Plan*, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2009, p. 15)

...the nature of married love

Authentic married love is caught up into Divine love and is directed and enriched by the redemptive power of Christ and the salvific action of the Church, with the result that the spouses are effectively led to God and are helped and strengthened in their lofty role as mothers and fathers. (The Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et spes*, no. 48)

Married love “is an eminently human one since it is directed from one person to another through an affection of the will; it involves the good of the whole person, and therefore can enrich the expressions of body and mind with a unique dignity This love God has judged worthy of special gifts, healing, perfecting and exalting gifts of grace and of charity. (The Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et spes*, no. 49)

Married love merges “the human with the divine” and “leads the spouses to a free and mutual gift of themselves, a gift providing itself by gentle affection and by deed, such

love pervades the whole of their lives: indeed by its busy generosity it grows better and grows greater.” (The Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et spes*, no. 49)

Conjugal love involves a totality, in which all the elements of the person enter—appeal of the body and instinct, power of feeling … aspiration of the spirit and of will. It aims at a deeply personal unity, a unity that, beyond union in one flesh, leads to forming one heart and soul; it demands indissolubility and faithfulness in definitive mutual giving; and it is open to fertility. (John Paul II, *Familiaris consortio*, no. 13)

God who created man out of love also calls him to love the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being. For man is created in the image and likeness of God who is himself love. Since God created him man and woman, their mutual love becomes an image of the absolute and unfailing love with which God loves man. It is good, very good, in the Creator’s eyes. And this love which God blesses is intended to be fruitful and to be realized in the common work of watching over creation: “and God blessed them, and God said to them: ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it.’” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1604)

Marriage and conjugal love are by their nature ordained toward the begetting and educating of children. Children are really the supreme gift of marriage and contribute very substantially to the welfare of their parents. (The Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 50)

The God Himself Who said, “it is not good for man to be alone” (Gen. 2:18) and “Who made man from the beginning male and female” (Matt. 19:4), wishing to share with man a certain special participation in His own creative work, blessed male and female, saying: “Increase and multiply” (Gen. 1:28). Hence, while not making the other purposes of matrimony of less account, the true practice of conjugal love, and the whole meaning of the family life which results from it, have this aim: that the couple be ready … to cooperate with the love of the Creator and the Savior. Who through them will enlarge and enrich His own family day by day. (The Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et spes*, no. 50)

Created in the image and likeness of God, the origin of all life, men and women are called to be partners with the Creator in transmitting the sacred gift of human life. (Pontifical Council on the Family, *The Ethical and Pastoral Dimensions of Population Trends*, March 25, 1994, no. 73)



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