



Conjugal Charity and The Pastoral Care of the Conjugal Bond in *Amoris Laetitia*

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Summary: Conjugal charity, understood as human and divine friendship, is a fruitful theological paradigm to articulate both the specific grace of the sacrament of matrimony as well as the pastoral care and spirituality of the bond as *res et sacramentum*. Read in light of the principle of integration, *Amoris Laetitia* offers valuable indications for the pastoral care of the conjugal bond and for married spirituality. Such indications are also valuable to understand the passages in Chapter Eight concerning the divorced and the remarried.

Key words: Conjugal charity, *Amoris Laetitia*, Spirituality of the bond.

Resumen: La caridad conyugal, entendida como amistad humana y divina, es un paradigma teológico fructífero para articular la gracia específica del sacramento del matrimonio, el cuidado pastoral y la espiritualidad del vínculo matrimonial como *res et sacramentum*. Leída a la luz del principio de integración, *Amoris Laetitia* nos ofrece indicaciones preciosas tanto para la cura pastoral del vínculo como para la espiritualidad matrimonial. Dichas indicaciones tienen un gran valor para entender los pasajes del Capítulo Ocho que hablan de los divorciados y vueltos a “casar.”

Palabras clave: caridad conyugal, *Amoris Laetitia*, espiritualidad del vínculo.

I. INTRODUCTION

Recent theological scholarship on the sacrament of matrimony has concentrated on the pastoral application of *Amoris Laetitia* (AL).¹ This article will follow a very similar trend of thought. Yet, its focal point is to draw attention to an oft-overlooked “jewel” found in Pope Francis’s Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation: the marriage bond, as *res et sacramentum*, is the primary object of both the pastoral care and the specific spirituality of married people.² Let us consider some of the key passages that I have in mind. The Holy Father explains that, “the pastoral care of engaged and married couples *should be centered on the marriage bond, assisting couples not only to deepen their love but also to overcome problems and difficulties.*”³ Thus, the pastoral care of difficult situations, which directly involve those who are validly married, needs to concentrate on the marriage bond. Indeed, for validly married people, the bond (*vinculum*) is present as a dispositive cause of grace until the death of one of the spouses. Even if the spouses are separated or have entered into a different union, the bond still exists. It can and should be made the object of pastoral care, according to the document, with two clear goals in mind: to *grow in love* and to *overcome problems and difficulties*.

Not in vain, AL identifies the marriage bond as the basis for a very specific spirituality: “*marital spirituality is a spirituality of the bond, in which love dwells.*”⁴ The spiritual life of every Christian always has charity as its center and core. The spiritual life of married people cannot be different. It must also

1 All of my reflections are to be understood as a continuation of the great and balanced interpretation offered by José Granados, Stephan Kampowski, and Juan José Pérez-Soba, *Accompanying, Discerning, Integrating: A Handbook for the Pastoral Care of the Family According to “Amoris Laetitia,”* trans. Michael J. Miller (Steubenville, Ohio: Emmaus Road Publishing, 2017). Unless otherwise indicated, all quotes from magisterial texts are taken from w2.vatican.va, except from the Theology of the Body, for which I will use John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, ed. Michael Waldstein (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 2006). Henceforth, I will refer to this last work as TOB.

2 For a study on the theological origins of the *res et sacramentum*, see Pedro López-González, “Origen de La expresión ‘Res et Sacramentum,’” *Scripta Theologica* 17, no. 1 (1985): 73–119. For its application in Thomas Aquinas and its implications for canon law, see Eloy Tejero, “La ‘res et Sacramentum’, Estructura y Espíritu Del Ordenamiento Canónico. Síntesis Doctrinal de Santo Tomás,” *Scripta Theologica* 15 (1983): 427–60. For a helpful summary of the grace of matrimony, see Cormac Burke, “Marriage as a Sacrament of Sanctification,” *Annales Theologici*, 9 (1995): 71–87.

3 AL, 211. Emphasis added.

4 *Ibid.*, 315. Emphasis added. For an introductory treatment of the marital bond, see Augusto Sarmiento, *El matrimonio cristiano* (Pamplona: EUNSA, 2001), 249–256.

have charity as its axis, especially in the face of its particular tasks, challenges, and difficulties. In this way, within marriage, charity takes on a specific conjugal dimension absent in the other states of life of the Christian. Hence, the spirituality of the bond must be a spirituality of married love, a spirituality of conjugal charity focused on the marriage bond as the dispositive cause of such a specific kind of love.

For this reason, Pope Francis exhorts married people to collaborate with the specific grace of the sacrament of matrimony: “The marriage bond finds new forms of expression and *constantly seeks new ways to grow in strength*. These both preserve and strengthen the bond. They call for *daily effort*. None of this, however, is possible without praying to the Holy Spirit for an outpouring of his *grace*, his supernatural strength and his spiritual fire, to *confirm, direct and transform our love* in every new situation.”⁵ I cannot think of a better light than this supernatural grace given by the Holy Spirit through the sacrament of matrimony in order to interpret what AL really means in Chapter 8 and the different pastoral scenarios therein proposed.

Following these invaluable indications, I intend to prove that conjugal charity, understood as human and divine friendship, is a fruitful theological paradigm to articulate both the specific grace of the sacrament of matrimony as well as the pastoral care and spirituality of the bond as *res et sacramentum*. Once I have developed this Thomistic theological reflection, I will come back to AL’s Chapter 8 and offer what I think is the most coherent and balanced interpretation of this document. The reason for this reflection is found in Pope Francis’s own words: “Everything written in *Amoris Laetitia* is Thomistic, from beginning to end.”⁶

In order to accomplish this goal, the first task at hand is to *dispel an erroneous methodology*, which consists in adopting Cardinal Kasper’s theological proposals—and the controversies they created—as AL’s main hermeneutical key.⁷ This methodology betrays the richness of the Apostolic Exhortation. It

5 AL, 164. Emphasis added.

6 Pope Francis, Address at the Opening of the Pastoral Congress of the Diocese of Rome (June 16, 2016).

7 For Cardinal Kasper’s proposal, see Walter Kasper, *The Gospel of the Family*, trans. William Madges (New York: Paulist Press, 2014). One should also take into consideration his longer treatment of mercy in Walter Kasper, *Mercy: The Essence of the Gospel and the Key to Christian Life*, trans. William Madges (New York: Paulist Press, 2014). For a profound evaluation of Kasper’s proposal, see Juan Jose Pérez-Soba and Stephan Kampowski, *The Gospel of the Family. Going Beyond Cardinal Kasper’s Proposal in the Debate on Marriage, Civil Re-Marriage, and Communion in the Church*, trans. Michael Miller (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2014).

isolates the difficult moral cases treated by Chapter 8. It makes of them the main point of this document without even considering the key role of conjugal charity, as explained in Chapter 4, for their authentic solution. Most importantly, this erroneous methodology ends up *misinterpreting* AL as contrary to previous teachings from John Paul II and Benedict XVI on communion for the divorced and remarried.

II. IN LIGHT OF THE PRINCIPLE OF INTEGRATION

The correct hermeneutical approach to AL must be based on the *principle of integration*. For Karol Wojtyła, this principle was *the* key to interpret Vatican II in continuity with previous magisterial teachings.⁸ The same should be applied to Pope Francis’s Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation. According to the Polish Pope, the principle of integration consists in “an organic cohesion expressing itself simultaneously in the thought and action of the Church as a community of believers. It expresses itself, that is, in such a way that on the one hand *we can rediscover and, as it were, re-read the Magisterium of the last Council in the whole previous Magisterium of the Church, while on the other we can rediscover and re-read the whole preceding Magisterium in that of the last Council.*”⁹

Following this same logic, one should reach two important conclusions: 1) we should rediscover and, as it were, reread AL’s teachings in previous magisterial pronouncements. 2) We should also rediscover and reread previous magisterial teachings in AL.

It is a great mistake not to follow these two directives, adopting instead Cardinal Kasper’s theological proposals as AL’s *key hermeneutical principle*. It would be as erroneous as not reading *Gaudium et Spes* (GS) in light of the previous councils, but adopting instead as *its chief hermeneutical key* Cardinal Suenens’ theological proposals and the discussions they generated back in the day. The often used and abused expression, “the spirit of Vatican II,” was born out of a very similar methodology, which led in the recent past to suggest a direct *opposition* between Paul VI’s *Humanae Vitae* (HV) and the alleged personalism inherent to GS.¹⁰

8 I have had the opportunity to explain Wojtyła’s understanding of Vatican II’s doctrine of marriage within the sphere of Christian responsibility in Angel Perez-Lopez, *Procreation and the Spousal Meaning of the Body: A Thomistic Argument Grounded in Vatican II* (Oregon: Pickwick, 2017), 11–29.

9 Karol Wojtyła, *Sources of Renewal: The Implementation of the Second Vatican Council*, trans. P.S. Falla (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980), 40–41. Emphasis added.

10 Wojtyła, instead, sees a strict continuity. See Perez-Lopez, *Procreation and the Spousal Meaning of the Body*, 46–60. The philosophical substratum of this theological book can

But let us be clear: Cardinal Suenens's theological opinions do not dictate the authentic meaning of GS in case of doubt or ambiguity. Likewise, Cardinal Kasper's proposals are not to determine AL's exact meaning. Both GS and AL should be read in light of the principle of integration. In case of doubt or ambiguity, AL should always be read in light of previous magisterial teachings.

The parallelism between GS and AL could be pushed forward one more step. One could easily apply Wojtyła's words about the dramatic situation created by this faulty methodology to our contemporary discussions around AL. Pay close attention to the following indications offered by him:

In judgments passed on the work necessary for the Council and on the Church's activity in the post-Conciliar period, undue emphasis was laid on divisions and differences between so-called integralists and progressives, while too little was said about the fact that both groups, in their responsibility towards the Church, must be unswervingly guided by the principle and demands of its identity, and that they must both therefore respect the principle of integration which is a precondition of the Church's identity.¹¹

Wojtyła calls both integralists and progressive theologians to respect this principle. *Mutatis mutandis*, we could use the contemporary terms, traditional and liberal theologians. Both should also respect the principle of integration in their interpretation of Pope Francis's Apostolic Exhortation. Let us consider two different scenarios.

On the one hand, there are those who presuppose discontinuity and lament it. But no one should critique the Pope, as if AL were teaching errors in matters of faith and morals. If a concrete passage is less clear, clarity will come when that passage is read in light of the previous magisterial pronouncements. This is exactly what most theologians already do with many passages from Vatican II. For instance, does GS 50 revoke the primacy of procreation previously affirmed by the magisterium? The question cannot be answered by looking only at this text from Vatican II. Its pastoral nature makes it less theologically precise than other magisterial documents. However, as John Paul II teaches, when read appropriately, Vatican II also taught that procreation is the primary

be found in Ángel Pérez López, *De la experiencia de la integración a la visión integral de la persona: Estudio histórico-analítico de la integración en "Persona y Acción" de Karol Wojtyła* (Valencia: Edicep, 2012).

11 Wojtyła, *Sources of Renewal*, 40–41. Emphasis added.

end of marriage.¹² To be sure, some of the participants who sided with Cardinal Suenens at Vatican II, and influenced by the theology of Herbert Doms, did not share that view.¹³ Yet, despite their own position, GS is to be read in another light different from their own proposals and controversies: it should be read considering the principle of integration. Likewise, when a passage in AL raises a question, perhaps because of its pastoral nature and the style in which it was written, *the question should always be answered by using the principle of integration as a hermeneutical key.*

On the other hand, there are those who presuppose discontinuity and celebrate it. But no one should shield their own theological heterodox opinions by interpreting AL as a document in direct discontinuity with Christ's revelation and previous magisterial pronouncements. We can establish the following parallelism. No theologian should appeal to "the personalism of GS" or to "the spirit of Vatican II" to justify any heterodox position in direct contradiction with previous magisterium in matters of faith and morals. There is no passage in Vatican II that accepts or opens the doors of the magisterium to accept contraception as a morally good act. There is no contradiction between Vatican II, *Humanae Vitae*, and *Veritatis Splendor*. Similarly, AL and *Familiaris Consortio* are in complete alignment. There is no passage in AL that opens the door to give Holy Communion to unrepentant divorced and remarried people, who are committing the sin of adultery, who are not willing to change their conduct, and discontinue their immoral acts. One document is to be read in light of the others.

Both theological approaches just described in these two scenarios are simply wrong. They are extremes. And as the Latin proverb says, "*extrema se tangunt*" (extremes touch each other). Both errors touch, as it were, or coincide in one axial point: their hermeneutical violation of the principle of integration.

For this reason, appealing to Wojtyła's principle, we must conclude that AL *could* and *should* be interpreted in continuity and harmony with previous magisterial teachings. The corollary implication is also quite clear. As a matter of fact, AL *could* be interpreted in discontinuity, disharmony, and rupture with previous magisterial teachings. Some theologians are already following that path. But such a potential interpretation *should not* be allowed. It is simply erroneous. Plainly speaking, it is a *misinterpretation*. It does not matter if that (mis)interpretation comes from a traditional or liberal theologian. In any case,

12 See TOB 127:3 and Perez-Lopez, *Procreation and the Spousal Meaning of the Body*, 239–268.

13 See Herbert Doms, *The Meaning of Marriage*, trans. G. Sayer (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1939).

it violates the hermeneutical principle of integration with which magisterial teachings should always be read in unchanging matters of faith and morals.

III. REREADING AL IN PREVIOUS MAGISTERIAL TEACHINGS

AL's key pastoral path of accompanying married people in crisis consists in invigorating the bond as *res et sacramentum* in order to grow in conjugal charity. This document establishes a clear common ground to theologically articulate the meaning of this path, by understanding both marriage and charity as friendship. Now, following the principle of integration, we will rediscover, and as it were, reread AL's teachings in previous magisterial pronouncements. This rereading and rediscovery will be accompanied by a Thomistic theological reflection, which fleshes out some of these magisterial coordinates. Once that first movement has been accomplished, we will be able to approach AL's Chapter 8 in order to rediscover and reread previous magisterial teachings in Pope Francis's Apostolic Exhortation.

Obviously, I do not intend to be exhaustive and go over all of the explicit teachings of the magisterium regarding marriage, which are pertinent to the topic of this paper.¹⁴ I will simply offer a brief selection of texts that determine the basic elements needed to support AL's views on conjugal charity and the pastoral care of the conjugal bond.

As is well known, Saint Paul condemned those who thought that marriage was not a holy reality. The Apostle explained to Timothy that "in later times some will depart from the faith by giving heed to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, through the pretensions of liars whose consciences are seared, who *forbid marriage* and enjoin abstinence from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth" (1 Tim 4:1–3; emphasis added). Those people who forbade marriage were influenced perhaps by the Manicheans. This error has reoccurred in the history of the Church. Once again, in the fifth century, the Council of Toledo had to clarify the dignity of marriage against similar attacks.¹⁵ By the time of the Council of Florence, we already find a very clear and succinct synthesis of the truth about the sacrament of marriage:

14 For a great resource, much more detailed and exhaustive, see Ramón García de Haro, *Marriage and the Family in the Documents of the Magisterium: A Course in the Theology of Marriage*, trans. William May (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993).

15 See Heinrich Denzinger, *Enchiridion Symbolorum Definitionum et Declarationum De Rebus Fidei et Morum. Compendium of Creeds, Definitions, and Declarations on Matters of Faith and Morals*, 43rd ed. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012). Henceforth, Denz., 206.

The seventh is the sacrament of matrimony, which is the sign of the union of Christ and the Church, according to the saying of the apostle: “This is a great mystery, and I mean in reference to Christ and the Church” (Eph 5: 32). The efficient cause of matrimony is the mutual consent duly expressed in words relating to the present. A triple good is found in matrimony. The first is the begetting of children and their education to the worship of God. The second is the faithfulness that each spouse owes to the other. Third is the indissolubility of marriage, inasmuch as it represents the indissoluble union of Christ and the Church. But, although it is permitted to separate on account of fornication, nevertheless it is not permitted to contract another marriage since the bond of a marriage legitimately contracted is perpetual.¹⁶

Another important moment in the history of the magisterial pronouncements regarding marriage is the Reformation. The reformers adopted a notion of sacrament as a promise in which one trusts. They argued that there is no such promise in the New Testament concerning matrimony. Thus, according to them, the jurisdiction of marriage belonged to the state and not to the Church.¹⁷ They also permitted divorce under certain circumstances. Among them were adultery, abandoning the home for ten years or more, not being willing to reconcile with one’s spouse after a discussion that brought about separation, and malice in the will of one of the spouses, to the point of impeding the other to practice his Christian duties.¹⁸

Just as Pope Francis forcefully teaches and repeats in AL, the Church has always considered the bond of a valid sacramental marriage to be *indissoluble*, even in the case in which one of the spouses will renounce his faith and abandon his partner.¹⁹ In light of the reformer’s errors, the Council of Trent taught that matrimony is a visible sign of an invisible reality, which confers sanctifying grace and is instituted by Christ. Thus, this Council condemns those who deny that matrimony is a real cause of grace: “If anyone says 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 invented by men in the Church, and does not confer grace: let him be anathema.”²⁰ Trent

16 Denz., 1327. See AL, 73.

17 This position is condemned by Trent in Denz., 1804.

18 See Justo Collantes, *La fe de la Iglesia Católica. Las ideas y los hombres en los documentos doctrinales del magisterio* (Madrid: BAC, 1994), 773.

19 See AL, 52–53, 62, 77, 86, 123, 134, 178, 243; Denz., 769.

20 Denz., 1801. See also *ibid.*, 1797–1799.

reiterates that the sacrament of matrimony “surpasses marital unions of the Old law in grace.”²¹ Condemning the reformer’s ideas about divorce, Trent explains: “if anyone says that the marriage bond [*matrimonii vinculum*] can be dissolved because of heresy or difficulties in cohabitation or because of the willful absence of one of the spouses, let him be anathema.”²²

Pope Francis’s repeated teaching about the indissolubility of the marriage bond is also affirmed in a crucial text from Trent that takes into consideration the Greeks and their practice of divorce. For this reason, one reads a sort of milder form of condemnation. Although the absolute indissolubility of sacramental marriage is taught, the Greeks are not condemned. Trent seems to simply tolerate their practices. Yet, this council forcefully condemns those who say that the Latin practice is wrong.²³

If anyone says that the Church is in error for having taught and for still teaching that in accordance with the evangelical and apostolic doctrine (cf. Mt 5:32; 19:9; Mk 10:11f; Lk 16:18; 1 Cor7:11), the marriage bond cannot be dissolved because of adultery on the part of one of the spouses and that neither of the two, not even the innocent one who has given no cause for infidelity, can contract another marriage during the lifetime of the other; and that the husband who dismisses an adulterous wife and marries again and the wife who dismisses an adulterous husband and marries again are both guilty of adultery, let him be anathema.²⁴

For our own purposes, we are going to move on in history all the way until the last part of the nineteenth century. At that time, Leo XIII, in *Arcanum Divinae* explained, just as we saw Pope Francis do in AL, that God perfected the natural institution of matrimony and elevated it to be a sacrament. By the perfection of the natural love between husband and wife, the Lord made of this sacrament an instrument whereby to grant the power to attain holiness: “Christ our Lord raised marriage to the dignity of a sacrament; that to husband and wife, guarded and strengthened by the heavenly grace which His merits gained for them, He gave power to attain holiness in the married state; and that, in a wondrous way, making marriage an example of the mystical union between

21 Ibid., 1800.

22 Ibid., 1805.

23 See Collantes, *La de La Iglesia Católica*, 779.

24 Denz., 1807. For a detailed monographic study of this text, see E. Christian Brugger, *The Indissolubility of Marriage and the Council of Trent* (Washington: CUA Press, 2017). See also Denz., 2967.

Himself and His Church, He not only perfected that love which is according to nature, but also made the naturally indivisible union of one man with one woman far more perfect through the bond of heavenly love”.²⁵ Thus, the clear doctrine of the indissolubility of marriage is combined with the explicit teaching on the perfection of the spouses’ natural love by the sacrament of matrimony as a cause of grace, transforming it into charity as heavenly love.

Moving on to the first part of the twentieth century, we encounter *Casti Connubi* developing this same theme. Therein, Pope Pius XI explicitly mentions that the sacrament of marriage confers a specific grace, whereby natural conjugal love is perfected and the sanctification of husband and wife is brought about. Christ made matrimony “a sign and source of that peculiar internal grace by which ‘it perfects natural love, it confirms an indissoluble union, and sanctifies both man and wife’.”²⁶

Casti Connubi states quite clearly what this specific grace looks like. It consists in the *supernatural power to fulfill the rights and duties of matrimony*. Through this particular sacrament, the faithful “open up for themselves a treasure of sacramental grace from which they draw supernatural power for the fulfilling of their rights and duties faithfully, holily, perseveringly even unto death. Hence this sacrament not only increases sanctifying grace, the permanent principle of the supernatural life, in those who, as the expression is, place no obstacle (*obex*) in its way, but also adds particular gifts, dispositions, seeds of grace, by elevating and perfecting the natural powers.”²⁷ The particular grace received from the sacrament of matrimony, consequently, allows the spouses to know, to firmly will and adhere, and to put into practice “those things which pertain to the marriage state, its aims and duties, giving them in fine right to the actual assistance of grace, whensoever they need it for fulfilling the duties of their state.”²⁸

Pius XI makes a very important observation for our topic and our pastoral approach. The peculiar or specific grace of the sacrament of matrimony is not something that flourishes on its own without the collaboration of the spouses. Just as Pope Francis said in *AL*, such a grace requires human cooperation in order to bear its due fruit. Thus, “the grace of matrimony will remain for the most part an unused talent hidden in the field unless the parties exercise these supernatural powers and cultivate and develop the seeds of grace they have received.”²⁹ If this cooperation is present, however, the specific grace of matrimony will aid

25 Leo XIII, *Arcanum Divinae*, 9. See also 24, 26.

26 Pius XI, *Casti Connubii*, 38.

27 *Ibid.*, 40.

28 *Ibid.*

29 *Ibid.*, 41.

spouses. It will make them “able with ease to bear the burdens of their state and to fulfill their duties. By such a sacrament they will be strengthened, sanctified and in a manner consecrated.”³⁰ Indeed, “the faithful once joined by marriage ties can never be deprived of the help and the binding force of the sacrament.”³¹

The Second Vatican Council, in GS 48, directs our attention to Pius XI’s *Casti Connubi* in order to understand the sacramentality of matrimony. It also speaks of conjugal love being inserted into Christ’s spousal charity for the Church. Although marriage does not imprint character like baptism, confirmation, or orders, it certainly has a first effect that is a sign and a cause of its specific grace. Thus, GS 48 says that, “Christian spouses have a special sacrament by which they are fortified and receive a kind of consecration.”³²

In *Lumen Gentium* (LG), Vatican II proposes the same teaching but focalizes the source of matrimonial grace in Christ’s spousal charity as it influences conjugal love and procreation. “Christian spouses, in virtue of the sacrament of matrimony, whereby *they signify and partake of the mystery of that unity and fruitful love which exists between Christ and His Church*, help each other to attain to holiness in their conjugal life and in the rearing and education of their children.”³³ Conferring a specific grace, the sacrament of marriage consecrates the spouses to a particular exercise of the priestly mission. Its fulfillment implies a Christian witness that is informed by the theological virtues, a witness to which spouses have been predestined and called in Christ.

Thus, according to Vatican II, the *mission* and the *testimony* of the spouses is based on their *participation* in the mission of Christ. Their mutual and fruitful love is elevated into the realm of charity and Christian responsibility. Due to the sacramentality of marriage as a cause of grace and as a sign, spouses are to make present in a visible manner Christ’s spousal charity for the Church. They are to do so by being just and faithful to their conjugal love, and by being sacrificially generous in their fruitfulness. This is the prophetic testimony (*martiria*) that results from their participation in Christ’s priestly *munus* “through the sacraments and the exercise of virtues.”³⁴ In turn, this participation implies the true freedom of those who reign with Christ by serving the Lord, living out the precepts of charity.³⁵

30 Ibid.

31 Ibid.

32 See also LG,35 and HV, 25. This passage has led some theologians to speak of a quasi-character in marriage. See Sarmiento, *El Matrimonio Cristiano*, 250–52.

33 LG, 11. Emphasis added.

34 Ibid. See also Wojtyła, *Sources of Renewal*, 97.

35 See LG, 36; Wojtyła, *Sources of Renewal*, 97–98.

John Paul II's *Familiaris Consortio* (FC) expands on our topic, providing invaluable indications. The pope directly identifies the marriage bond with the first effect of the sacrament of matrimony as the *res et sacramentum*. Thus, he explains that, in the case of marriage, “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.”³⁶

FC also teaches that through the sacrament of matrimony, “the Spirit which the Lord pours forth gives a new heart, and renders man and woman capable of loving one another as Christ has loved us. Conjugal love reaches that fullness to which it is interiorly ordained, conjugal charity, which is the proper and specific way in which the spouses participate in and are called to live the very charity of Christ who gave Himself on the Cross.”³⁷ The sacrament of matrimony is based on the baptismal vocation. Baptism places every man and woman within the sphere of “the spousal covenant of Christ with the Church.”³⁸ The pope explains that it is “because of this indestructible insertion that the intimate community of conjugal life and love, founded by the Creator, is elevated and assumed into the spousal charity of Christ, sustained and enriched by His redeeming power.”³⁹ This specific kind of charity entails a special *reciprocal belonging*. “By virtue of the sacramentality of their marriage, spouses are bound to one another in the most profoundly indissoluble manner. Their belonging to each other is the real representation, by means of the sacramental sign, of the very relationship of Christ with the Church.”⁴⁰

John Paul offers a paradigm in order to think about the intimate connection between the sacrament of matrimony and Christ’s priestly gift of self for the Church in His Passion. The pope explains that matrimony is a *memorial*, an *actuation*, and a *prophecy* of what took place on the Cross. This paradigm allows for a further specification of the specific grace of the sacrament of matrimony. Inasmuch as it is a *memorial*, matrimony “gives them [spouses]

36 FC, 13. See also *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (New York: Doubleday, 1997). [Henceforth, CCC] 1640.

37 FC, 13. See also FC, 29; LG, 57. CCC 1827 also speaks of charity perfecting human love. This same teaching is also applied in CCC 1641 to matrimony: “‘By reason of their state in life and of their order, [Christian spouses] have their own special gifts in the People of God’. This grace proper to the sacrament of Matrimony is intended to perfect the couple’s love and to strengthen their indissoluble unity. By this grace they ‘help one another to attain holiness in their married life and in welcoming and educating their children’.”

38 FC, 13.

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid.

the grace and duty of commemorating the great works of God and of bearing witness to them before their children.”⁴¹ Insofar as matrimony is an actuation, it “gives them [spouses] 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.”⁴² Finally, as prophecy, matrimony “gives them the grace and duty of living and bearing witness to the hope of the future encounter with Christ.”⁴³

Grounded in that same teaching, John Paul II explains in TOB that marriage is one of the seven sacraments of the Church.⁴⁴ Reading Ephesians 5:21–23 with the whole sacramental economy in view, one realizes that, in the great analogy, marriage is presupposed and, at the same time, rediscovered. It is presupposed as a sacrament of creation. But it is rediscovered as a sacrament of the new economy, created anew as the fruit of Christ’s spousal and redemptive love for the church.⁴⁵ Christ’s revelation of the truth about marriage “reaches its definitive fullness in the gift of love which the Word of God makes to humanity in assuming a human nature, and in the sacrifice which Jesus Christ makes of Himself on the Cross for His bride, the Church.”⁴⁶ The sacrament of matrimony gives a specific grace to the spouses. Based on 1 Corinthians 7:7 and LG 11, John Paul II speaks of a gift of their own.⁴⁷

John Paul views the sacrament of marriage as organically linked with the ethos of redemption that should characterize the life of Christians. The sacramental economy of the New Law is directed to the human person in the state of sinfulness (*status naturae lapasae*), and wounded by the threefold concupiscence.⁴⁸ Thus, the redemption of the body accomplished in Christ helps “to overcome the consequences of sin and to build the unity of man and woman according to the Creator’s eternal plan.”⁴⁹ Redemption is a grace or God-given gift to man in the new covenant in Christ. Yet, it requires a personal and moral response to that gift. As a result, marriage is not only a sacrament, but also *a moral exhortation* to share consciously in the redemption of the body. The human person receives “in marriage the sacrament of redemption as grace and sign of the covenant with God—and it is assigned to him as an ethos.”⁵⁰

41 Ibid.

42 Ibid.

43 Ibid.

44 See TOB 98:7.

45 See *ibid.*, 102:1.

46 FC, 13.

47 See TOB 103:6.

48 See *ibid.*, 98:3–5.

49 *Ibid.*, 100:2.

50 *Ibid.*, 100:7.

IV. MARRIAGE AND CHARITY AS FRIENDSHIP

So far we have seen how the conjugal bond is the first effect of the sacrament of matrimony. It serves as a dispositive cause for its specific grace, which consists in the elevation of natural conjugal love to the realm of supernatural charity. Matrimony is, consequently, a visible sign of the invisible reality of Christ's love for the Church, a sign instituted by Christ that is also capable of being a cause of grace to attain holiness in the married state. Conjugal charity is its peculiar or specific grace. Thereby, spouses fulfill their rights and duties, expressed in their marriage promises. Yet, such fulfillment requires their cooperation. In this manner, the specific grace received will not end up like an unused talent hidden in the field. Conjugal charity elevates and assumes conjugal love into Christ's spousal charity for the Church. It brings about one possible way of perfecting the baptismal call. As a sacrament, matrimony confers a grace and a corresponding obligation to commemorate God's work, thereby witnessing to others in the family, to put into practice the demands of conjugal love, and to hope in the definitive fulfillment of the spousal meaning of the body in heaven.

Before AL, the Church's magisterium had spoken of marriage as kind of friendship.⁵¹ But Pope Francis's document moves one step forward by placing the elevation of conjugal love into charity within the context of friendship and the goods of marriage as an ethical or moral task.⁵² Pope Francis teaches that, in complete continuity with the previous magisterium, "mutual self-giving in the sacrament of matrimony is *grounded in the grace of baptism*, which establishes the foundational covenant of every person with Christ in the Church. In accepting each other, and with Christ's grace, the engaged couple promise each other total self-giving, faithfulness and openness to new life. The couple recognizes these elements as constitutive of marriage, gifts offered to them by God, and take seriously their mutual commitment, in God's name and in the presence of the Church. Faith thus *makes it possible for them to assume the goods of marriage as commitments that can be better kept through the help of the grace of the sacrament*."⁵³

As Pope Francis clearly states, "we cannot encourage a path of fidelity and mutual self-giving without encouraging the growth, strengthening and deepening of conjugal and family love. Indeed, *the grace of the sacrament of marriage is intended before all else 'to perfect the couple's love'*."⁵⁴ Later on in the document,

51 See GS ,49; HV, 9; FC, 25; John Paul II, *Redemptoris Custos*, 20; TOB 109:4.

52 See AL, 69.

53 *Ibid.*, 73. Emphasis added.

54 *Ibid.*, 89.

Francis explains that his own reflection on Paul's Hymn to charity "has prepared us to discuss conjugal love. This is the love between husband and wife, a love sanctified, *enriched and illuminated by the grace of the sacrament of marriage*. It is an 'affective union,' spiritual and sacrificial, which combines the warmth of *friendship* and erotic passion, and endures long after emotions and passion subside. Pope Pius XI taught that this *love* permeates the duties of married life and *enjoys pride of place*. Infused by the Holy Spirit, this powerful love is a reflection of the unbroken covenant between Christ and humanity that culminated in His self-sacrifice on the cross. 'The Spirit which the Lord pours forth gives a new heart and renders man and woman capable of loving one another as Christ loved us. *Conjugal love reaches that fullness to which it is interiorly ordained: conjugal charity*.'"⁵⁵

AL appeals to the traditional understanding of marriage as friendship: "*Marriage is likewise a friendship* marked by passion, but a passion always directed to an ever more stable and intense union. This is because 'marriage was not instituted solely for the procreation of children' but also that mutual love 'might be properly expressed, that it should grow and mature'. *This unique friendship between a man and a woman* acquires an all-encompassing character only within the conjugal union. Precisely as all-encompassing, this union is also exclusive, faithful and open to new life. It shares everything in constant mutual respect. The Second Vatican Council echoed this by stating that 'such a love, *bringing together the human and the divine, leads the partners to a free and mutual self-giving*, experienced in tenderness and action, and permeating their entire lives'."⁵⁶

In continuity with GS 49, Francis clearly envisions marriage as "*conjugal friendship*."⁵⁷ He even quotes Thomas Aquinas and alludes to the philosophy of Aristotle on the matter. Thus, Francis compares marriage and charity as forms of friendship in the following terms: "after the love that unites us to God, conjugal love is the 'greatest form of friendship'."⁵⁸ As the pope also says: "The love of friendship unifies all aspects of marital life and helps family members to grow constantly."⁵⁹

55 Ibid., 120. Emphasis added.

56 Ibid., 125. Emphasis added.

57 Ibid., 156. See also 142, 207.

58 Ibid., 123; See also Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles: Liber de Veritate Catholicae Fidei Contra Errores Infidelium*, ed. P. Marc, C. Pera, and P. Caramello (Taurini-Rome: Marietti, 1961), III. 123. Henceforth, *SCG*.

59 AL, 133.

This friendship is perfected in charity, which the pope also envisions as friendship with God. Thus, he recalls that, “the order of redemption illuminates and fulfills that of creation. Natural marriage, therefore, is fully understood in the light of its fulfillment in the sacrament of Matrimony: only in contemplating Christ does a person come to know the deepest truth about human relationships. ‘Only in the mystery of the Incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light... Christ, the new Adam, by the revelation of the mystery of the Father and his love, fully reveals man to himself and makes his supreme calling clear’ (Gaudium et Spes, 22). It is particularly helpful to understand in a Christocentric key... the good of the spouses (*bonum coniugum*),” which includes unity, openness to life, fidelity, indissolubility and, within Christian marriage, mutual support *on the path towards complete friendship with the Lord.*”⁶⁰

Referring again to the Angelic Doctor, Francis explains that, “Saint Thomas Aquinas said that the word ‘joy’ refers to an expansion of the heart. Marital joy can be experienced even amid sorrow; it involves accepting that marriage is an inevitable mixture of enjoyment and struggles, tensions and repose, pain and relief, satisfactions and longings, annoyances and pleasures, but *always on the path of friendship*, which inspires married couples to care for one another: ‘they help and serve each other’”⁶¹.

V. THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

V.1. *The Goodness of Marriage as Conjugal Friendship*

The Church’s teaching on marriage as kind of friendship invites a theological reflection which clarifies that although every marriage is a kind of friendship, not every friendship qualifies to be a marriage. There is a need to explain theologically and philosophically why marriage is the kind of friendship that is specified and perfected by the common good and end of procreation.

Saint Augustine already envisioned marriage as a kind of friendship, uniquely characterized by the couples’ walk together towards the end of procreation.⁶² Marriage is a friendship that is conjugal because it yokes together husband and

60 Ibid., 77. Emphasis added.

61 AL, 126. Emphasis added.

62 “Forasmuch as each man is a part of the human race, and human nature is something social, and has for a great and natural good, the power also of *friendship*; on this account God willed to create all men out of one, in order that they might be held in their society not only by likeness of kind, but also by bond of kindred. Therefore the first natural bond of human society is man and wife.” St. Augustine, *De bono coniugali*, 1, 1. Emphasis added.

wife in view of a common walk towards forming a family. The goodness of marriage is synthesized, as it were, in the goods of offspring (*proles*), fidelity (*fides*), and the sacrament (*sacramentum*). In addition, the goodness of marriage is also manifested in its being a remedy for concupiscence and in the mutual care for each of the spouses.⁶³

With respect to the good of offspring, Burt explains that, according to St. Augustine, “God did not want this creative act [the conjugal act] to be simply a cold, mechanical union of bodies. It was to be accomplished through an intimate loving act of friends who would reach out to embrace each other and the child that they had helped to create.”⁶⁴ Augustine emphasizes that married love is an integral part of the good of offspring. This inclusion allows for a particular subordination.⁶⁵ Augustine himself affirms: “I do not believe that marriage is good solely because of the procreation of children. There is also a natural association between the sexes.”⁶⁶

This is where the Augustinian understanding of *fides* comes in: “Augustine maintained that the essential characteristic of a valid marriage is that it be a union of friends, a friendship solidified by *fidelity to one’s spouse (fides)* and the *permanence of the commitment (sacramentum)*.”⁶⁷ What the good of *fides* shows about conjugal friendship is, first of all, its *exclusivity*. For a man to be married to a woman means that one will give one’s body only to the other. Moreover, it also means that one will give one’s conjugal love only to the other. “The fidelity demanded of a married couple is fidelity expressed through the preservation of chastity; chastity in this context means a special giving of body and soul to each other and to none other.”⁶⁸ Such fidelity, Burt explains, is a fidelity in body and spirit. For this reason, Augustine describes fidelity as a “great spiritual good to which one sacrifices all earthly goods and even life

63 See Donald X. Burt, *Friendship and Society: An Introduction to Augustine’s Practical Philosophy* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eermands Publishing Company, 1999), 81.

64 *Ibid.*, 82.

65 “Although procreation was the primary reason for the creation of the family, the essential element in the family is something else entirely. In Augustine’s view marriage is constituted by a commitment between husband and wife where each gives oneself to the other in a spiritual bond expressed through friendship [...]. This conviction led Augustine to insist that a marriage can exist even when the union is infertile by reason of age, illness, or a free mutual decision of the partners to remain continent for good reasons. A marriage can exist without children but it cannot and does not exist where there is no union of hearts [*concordia*].” *Ibid.*, 83.

66 *De bono conjugali*, 3.3.

67 Burt, *Friendship and Society*, 83.

68 *Ibid.*, 84.

itself.”⁶⁹ He thus explains: “Fidelity involves the whole of the shared life of the spouses, especially in their obligation to support each other’s weakness.”⁷⁰

With respect to the good of the sacrament, Augustine seems to have had two opinions. At first, in *The Good of Marriage*, he limits the good of *sacramentum* to marriage between Christians. He explains that “the good of marriage among all nations and all men resides in its being a cause of generation (*causa generationis*) and in the spouses’ fidelity of chastity (*in fide castitatis*). In marriages among members of the people of God, however, there is an additional good: the sanctity of the sacrament (*sanctitate sacramenti*).”⁷¹ However, years later, when discoursing against the Pelagians, he seems to imply a slight change of opinion. He seems to say that the sacred character or *sacramentum* of marriage is found *especially*, but not exclusively, in the marriage between Christians.

This brief and incomplete characterization of the goods of marriage shows, nevertheless, that for Augustine, the union between husband and wife is a union of friends.⁷² He characterizes that union with what he regards as *the* essential element of friendship: *concordia*.⁷³ In his work *De fide rerum quae non videtur*, Augustine explains that we have faith and trust in our friends’ love for us, even when such a love is not seen because it has not been tested by difficulties. Without this faith and trust, friendship would not be possible. This would be a disaster for marriage and family life.⁷⁴

Following this theological tradition as well as the newly rediscovered philosophy of Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas affirms unequivocally that marriage is a kind of friendship.⁷⁵ As we already know, he actually says that marriage is the *greatest* friendship.⁷⁶ Following Aristotle, Aquinas thinks that marriage is

69 *De bono coniguali*, 4.4.

70 *Ibid.*, 6,6.

71 *Ibid.*, 24,32.

72 See Burt, *Friendship and Society*, 86-90.

73 According to Burt, Augustine “remarks that one of the reasons that faith and trust are necessary in human affairs is because without them friendship is impossible and without friendship marriage is impossible.” *Ibid.*, 87.

74 “Further, friendship perishing, there will be preserved in the mind the bonds neither of marriages, nor of kindreds and relations; because in these also there is assuredly a common sentiment based on friendship. Spouse therefore will not be able to love spouse in turn, inasmuch as each believes not the other’s love, because the love itself cannot be seen. Nor will they long to have sons, who they believe not will make them a return. And if these be born and grow up, much less will the parents themselves love their own children, whose love towards themselves in those children’s hearts they will not see, it being invisible.” *De fide rerum quae non videtur*, 2. 4.

75 See Jesús García López, “El Amor Humano,” *Persona y Derecho* 1 (1974): 277.

76 *SCG* III, 123.

“conjugal friendship” and that this friendship could and should be virtuous.⁷⁷ Only in this state of virtue can marriage be considered as the greatest friendship. As *virtuous* conjugal friendship, marriage is not any union, but the greatest among human persons: “the union of man and woman in marriage is the greatest, since it is [a union] of both souls and bodies.”⁷⁸ Indeed, according to Aquinas, husbands are not to relate to their wives as their slaves, as sheer instruments or tools. Wives have the same natural dignity of being human persons, as do their husbands. Thus, their friendship is to be an *amicitia liberalis*.⁷⁹ The husband is not to become a sort of “tyrant” who instrumentalizes his wife, as if she were a sheer tool: “But this happens under tyranny because the tyrant does not strive for the common good but for his own. Thus he acts with his subjects like a workman with a tool, a soul with the body, or a master with a slave, for the tyrant uses his subjects as slaves... However, those who use things do not have friendships toward them. Even if they somehow benefit the things, they intend by this the good of the things only as it is related to their own good.”⁸⁰

V.2. *Human Procreation as a Human Phenomenon*

Now, in order to rediscover the role of procreation in specifying and perfecting marriage as one kind of friendship, we need to go beyond naturalistic physicalism and account for man’s substantial unity, for the spirituality and immortality of his soul, and for his place of honor within the created cosmos by virtue of his rational mode of being (*esse*).⁸¹ Only then can procreation be conceived as a generically animal but specifically rational phenomenon, something that cannot be simply equated with the reproduction of irrational animals. To be sure, at a very generic level, one could compare how rabbits and human persons reproduce and find some minimal commonalities. But this comparison will always fall short. Human procreation is the free collaboration with the Creator in the transmission and education of human life.

77 See Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Nichomachean Ethics*, trans. C. I. Lintzinger (Notre Dame, IN: Dumb Ox Books, 1993), lect. 12. Henceforth, *In Ethic*. See also Thomas Aquinas, *Comentum in Quartum Librum Sententiarum Magistri Petri Lombardi*. Vol. 7/2, Opera Omnia, 872-1259 (Parma: Typis Petri Fiaccadori, 1858), d. 26, q. 2, a. 2, c. Henceforth, *In IV Sent*.

78 Thomas Aquinas, *In IV Sent.*, d. 27, q. 1, a. 1, qc. 2, ad 3.

79 See *SCG* III, 124.

80 *In VIII Ethic.*, lect. 11, nn. 1698–1699.

81 For a more extensive treatment of this very topic, see Perez-Lopez, *Procreation and the Spousal Meaning of the Body*, 239–269.

Aquinas explains that, “the nature of man inclines to something in two ways. In one way, because it befits the nature of his genus: and this is common to all animals. In another way, because it befits the nature of the difference by which the human species exceeds its genus, inasmuch as man is rational . . . And thus the nature of the genus, although it is one among all animals, yet it is not in all in the same way.”⁸² We do not reproduce like rabbits but like *rational* animals, like human persons. Human procreation is not just a matter of sheer biology, or the numerical increase of the human race. Rather, it marks an elective act, the beginning of a person’s existence, and the future task of his education.⁸³

Out of the reproduction of irrational animals flows a relatively brief period of nourishment and physical care for the offspring, which is accomplished by instinct. In the case of the human person, procreation also includes, as its extension, the care for the offspring. Although this care includes nourishment and physical sustenance, it also entails the very distinctive human phenomenon of education, understood as the “full spiritual development of a human person.”⁸⁴ This fact opens our eyes to the spiritual realm. “Paternity and maternity in the world of persons are the mark of *a certain spiritual perfection, the capacity for ‘procreation’ in the spiritual sense, the forming of souls.*”⁸⁵ Spiritual parenthood is not restricted to those who live in celibacy or virginity. It also belongs to those who are married. Thus, “a father and mother who have given their children life in the merely biological sense must then *supplement physical parenthood by spiritual parenthood*, taking whatever pains are necessary for their *education.*”⁸⁶ By education, we mean here the full spiritual development of a human person, that is, his formation in virtue. As Thomas says, education is “the [human person’s] development and promotion to the perfect state of man inasmuch as he is man, that is, the state of virtue.”⁸⁷

Human procreation is fully attained in *responsible* parenthood. Parents need to respond to God. Since spouses are persons, God rules them in His

82 See *In IV Sent.*, d. 26, q. 1, a. 1, ad 1.

83 For this reason, Karol Wojtyła explains that procreation “is more appropriate here than ‘reproduction,’ which tends to have a *purely biological meaning*. We are speaking of course, not merely of the beginning of life in a purely biological sense but of the beginning of a person’s existence, and so it is *better to use the term ‘procreation.’*” Karol Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, trans. H. Willets (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), 226. Emphasis added. Henceforth, LR.

84 LR, 55.

85 Ibid. Emphasis added.

86 Ibid. Emphasis added.

87 *In IV Sent.*, d. 26, q. 1, a. 1, c. See Antonio Millán-Puelles, *La formación de la personalidad humana* (Madrid: Ediciones Rialp, 1963).

providence, not by way of instinct, but rather by asking them to freely and virtuously collaborate with the Creator.⁸⁸ This constitutes another specifically rational mark of the essence of human procreation, unveiled by the intrinsic presence of virtuous love.⁸⁹ For this collaboration or participation with the Creator to take place, there are two dimensions of interpersonal communion that need to grow within marriage. First, there is an interpersonal dimension which directly involves the relationship between husband and wife. The second dimension presupposes this first one. In order to collaborate with the Creator, spouses need to be united as in a common subject. They need to be in communion by their sharing in their common parental *munus*. This last dimension of procreation unveils ulterior religious and metaphysical traits of this rich phenomenon. Since God directly creates man's spiritual soul *ex nihilo*, what husband and wife "provide for" in their collaboration with the Creator is the adequate "matter" for the reception of that spiritual soul. In that sense, their collaboration with the Creator is 'material,' so to speak.⁹⁰ However, in this other sense, their collaboration with the Creator is also 'formal.' They decide in right and informed conscience to adhere to God's will. They desire to find out whether or not God wants them to have another baby. This intimate discernment and adherence to God's will is possible when the decision is based on a self-sacrificial and loving evaluation of the true good of the family, that of any other children, that of the spouses, society, and the Church.

These religious and metaphysical marks of human procreation reveal that the participation with God extends beyond the generation of human offspring. The Creator also participates in the educational process by sustaining the child in his being, by loving him, by acting in his providential care, by giving him sanctifying grace, virtues, gifts, etc. God "does not leave the work of education, which may in a certain sense be called the continuous creation of personality, wholly and entirely to the parents but Himself takes part in it, in His own person."⁹¹ Only God is *the* Creator. Human parents collaborate with him but their collaboration does not imply that they are equal to God. They are not on a par. Although the love of parents should be present at procreation, we cannot

88 See *SCG* III. 113; GS 24, 50.

89 "When a man and a woman consciously and of their own free will choose to marry and have relations they choose at the same time the possibility of procreation, they choose to *participate in creation* (for that is the proper meaning of the word procreation). And it is only when they do so that they put their sexual relationship within the framework of marriage *on a truly personal level*." LR, 227. Emphasis added.

90 See LR, 55.

91 LR, 56.

forget about the love of the Creator. That divine love finds its continuation in the work of supernatural grace. Parents, instead, have their proper role in this supernatural dimension as well, but always as co-creators *subordinated* to the Creator.

V.3. *Marriage as Conjugal Friendship*

The imposition of names often provides a direct contact with what is most evident in the human experience of a given phenomenon. For this reason, the Scholastics used to begin their studies with a nominal definition of the reality under scrutiny. One could identify five different possibilities for the etymology of the word ‘marriage’ (*matrimonium*).

First, *matrimonium* could be derived from *matris* + *munus*, thereby indicating the *officium* of the wife in the education of children. Thus, a woman should marry a man because she loves him in such a way that she wants to become a mother with him as the father of her children. Second, *matrimonium* could be derived from *matrem* + *muniens* (from the verb, *munio*, to protect or fortify), thereby indicating that marriage provides for the mother a support and protector for her *officium* in the person of her husband. Third, *matrimonium* could be derived from *matrem* + *monens* (from the verb, *moneo*, to admonish), thereby indicating that marriage admonishes a mother in view of her *officium* not to leave her husband for another man. Fourth, *matrimonium* could be derived from *materia* + *unius*, thereby indicating that husband and wife come together in marriage, providing the matter—God provides the form or the soul—for the generation of offspring. Fifth, *matrimonium* could be derived from *matre* + *nato* (from the adjective *natus*, born, designed, intended or even destined), thereby indicating that marriage brings the woman to fulfillment in that for which she was made, in that for which she was born: to become a mother.

All of these etymologies underline that parenthood and procreation is something evidently known by human beings as intimately related to marriage. For this reason, having clarified the true meaning of procreation as a human phenomenon, we can take the following step: we are now able to understand marriage as *conjugal friendship*, that is, as a union of persons of the opposite sex specified by the common good of procreation.

Union among human persons is always an accidental union based on a common origin or a common end: “If this happens, a special bond is established between me and this other person: the bond of a *common good* and of a common aim. This special bond does not mean merely that we both seek a common good, it *also unites the persons involved internally and so constitutes*

the essential core around which any love must grow. In any case, love between two people is quite unthinkable without some common good to bind them together.”⁹²

The love that pertains to conjugal friendship, although being generically benevolent and beneficent, deserves a more specific qualification. This benevolent love, whereby one unites his destiny and existence to that of another person becoming, as it were, one subject, must essentially be between persons of the opposite sex, and disposed to procreation. Not every union of persons in friendship or *communio* can be conjugal or marital. For a friendship to be conjugal, it must be affected by the parenting *munus*, that is, by the possibility of procreation: “the *marital relationship* is therefore not just a union of persons, a reciprocal relationship between a man and a woman, but *is essentially a union of persons affected by the possibility of procreation.*”⁹³ Pursuing such a common good conditions and implies, at the same time, the continual ripening or maturation of the love between spouses. Procreation is the objective primary end of marriage because it objectively specifies the very essence of marriage and because it objectively presupposes the other ends for its fulfillment. Responsibility for procreation includes, in itself, responsibility for the integration of love between the spouses.

V.4. Rekindle the Conformation to Christ’s Spousal Charity

“Rekindle the gift of God that is within you” (2 Tim 1:6). A proper pastoral care of the conjugal bond leads us to rediscover these same words within a new and different context. Originally, Saint Paul addressed these words to Timothy. He is making a direct reference to the ordination of the latter. He appeals to the priestly character received at the ordination as a *res et sacramentum*, as a dispositive cause of a specific priestly grace. *Mutatis mutandis*, we can also apply this same passage to those who are married. We can also appeal to the *res et sacramentum* of matrimony, to the conjugal bond. And we can see in it the dispositive cause to grow in conjugal charity as the specific grace of this sacrament.

Thomas Aquinas explains this key role of the bond with the following comparison: “just as the water of Baptism together with the form of words results immediately not in the infusion of grace, but in the imprinting of the character, so the outward acts and the words expressive of consent directly effect a certain bond, which is the sacrament of matrimony; and this bond by

92 LR, 28. Emphasis added.

93 LR, 226. Emphasis added.

virtue of its Divine institution works dispositively to the infusion of grace.”⁹⁴ Hence, the marriage bond is a continuing dispositive source of grace.

Apparently, recent theological reflection has paid more attention to matrimony as a sign than as a cause of grace. However, if we ask Aquinas about this topic, he would explain that the characteristic grace given by matrimony consists in a special conformation with Christ’s passion. The Angelic Doctor explicitly speaks of a configuration to Christ’s spousal charity, as revealed in His Passion and Death: “marriage does not conform to the passion of Christ in suffering, yet it *conforms* to the same passion *in the charity* by which he suffered for the Church in order that she might be joined to him *as bride* [*conformat tamen ei quantum ad caritatem per quam pro Ecclesia sibi in sponsam conjungenda passus est*].”⁹⁵ Such a conformity directly impacts the goods of offspring and fidelity: “since in marriage a man is given by divine institution the faculty of enjoying [*uti*] his wife for the procreation of children, *grace is also given without which he could not do this fittingly*.”⁹⁶

Marriage is not a remedy for concupiscence because it gives lust, as it were, “lawful citizenship.” On the contrary, the grace of the sacrament of marriage is a remedy for concupiscence because it helps to integrate sexual desires into the conjugal act, the latter being ordered by right reason and conjugal charity to the goods of marriage, especially those of *proles* and *fides*.⁹⁷ Indeed, the conformation of the spouses to Christ’s spousal charity remedies concupiscence.⁹⁸ As a natural institution, marriage remedied concupiscence inasmuch as it called for a virtuous integration of one’s sexual desire into the order of right reason.⁹⁹ As a sacrament of the New law, matrimony empowers spouses to live up to that call to integrate their conjugal love. The sacrament

94 *In IV Sent.*, d. 26 q. 2 a. 3 ad 2: “sicut aqua Baptismi vel forma verborum non operatur ad gratiam immediate, sed ad characterem; ita actus exteriores et verba exprimentia consensus directe faciunt nexum quemdam, qui est sacramentum matrimonii; et huiusmodi nexus ex virtute divinae institutionis dispositive operatur ad gratiam.” See also Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*. Latin/English Edition of the Works of St. Thomas Aquinas, vols. 13–20, ed. J. Mortensen and E. Alarcón (Lander: The Aquinas Institute, 2012), II–II, q. 100, a. 2, ad 6. Henceforth, *ST*. See also *SCG* IV. 78.

95 *In IV Sent.*, d. 26, q. 2, a. 1, ad 3. See also TOB 131:1.

96 *In IV Sent.*, d. 26, q. 2, a. 3, c. Emphasis added.

97 See Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Letters of Saint Paul to the Corinthians*. Latin/English Edition of the Works of St. Thomas Aquinas, vol. 38, trans. F. R. Larcher, B. Mortensen, and D. Keating, ed. J. Mortensen and E. Alarcón (Lander: The Aquinas Institute, 2012), cap. 7, lect. 1. Henceforth, *Super Cor*.

98 See *In IV Sent.*, d. 26, q. 2, a. 3, ad 4.

99 *Super I Cor.*, cap. 7, lect. 1. See *In IV Sent.*, d. 26, q. 2, a. 3, c.

of matrimony confers a specific grace with the power to conform and elevate human conjugal love to Christ's spousal charity. Since concupiscence is a great threat to the fulfillment of any of the Christian responsibilities of marriage, the grace given by the sacrament of marriage must be a remedy to such a threat.¹⁰⁰ It is better to marry than to be aflame, not because marriage is a safe haven for lust, but because the order of one's passions in view of the truth about the good is better than the disorder of passions that enslave reason to the service of selfish desire.¹⁰¹

This conformity with Christ's spousal charity effected by the sacrament of matrimony has *moral* and *ontological* dimensions. Christ is *the* way towards salvation. He is the moral and ontological example for spouses in matrimony. The sacrament of marriage is Christ-conforming. Its grace becomes a sort of education, a leading-by-the-hand (*manducatio*) towards eternal salvation.¹⁰²

The moral aspect of Christ's exemplarity in marriage focuses on the spouses' imitation of Christ in their collaboration with God and the sacrament of matrimony in its dimension of sign. Such collaboration is Christocentric because Christ is the living pattern of evangelical virtues and of the human effort to collaborate with God.¹⁰³ Yet, Christ's moral exemplarity differs radically from that of other virtuous men. Unlike the example of a human person, Jesus' is theandric. It is the example of the God-Man. It transcends all times and situations.¹⁰⁴ As a result, our Lord is the example of conjugal charity always, everywhere, and under every circumstance. Nothing that the Incarnate Word experienced is without meaning for salvation. Each and every act performed in His humanity did bear, and continues to bear, salvific efficacy, thanks to the sacraments.¹⁰⁵ Among those salvific events, Christ's Passion is foundational for the sacrament of marriage. At the celebration of this sacrament, the spouses are in real "contact" with Christ's spousal gift of self on the cross for the Church (cf. Eph 5:25). This particular event configures the spouses to the Son by the Holy Spirit, so that their will is

100 See *In IV Sent.*, d. 26, q. 2, a. 3, c.

101 See TOB 101:3.

102 See *ST III*, q. 7, a. 9.

103 See Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*. Latin/English Edition of the Works of St. Thomas Aquinas, vols. 35–36, trans. F. R. Larcher (Lander: The Aquinas Institute, 2013), cap. 13, lect. 3, n. 1781. Henceforth, *Super Io*.

104 See *ST III*, q. 40, a. 2, ad 1; *III*, q. 40, a. 1, ad 3.

105 See *ST III*, q. 48, a. 6; Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans*. Latin/English Edition of the Works of St. Thomas Aquinas, vol. 37, trans. F. R. Larcher, ed. J. Mortensen and E. Alarcón (Lander: The Aquinas Institute, 2012), cap. 6, lect. 2, n. 490. Henceforth, *Super Rom*.

rendered capable of imitating Christ's willful self-gift in obedience to the Father.¹⁰⁶ Thus, the spouses are empowered with the grace to will in their marriage what God wills, and as God wills it.

The ontological aspect of Christ's exemplarity is intrinsically tied into the moral aspect. Christ is not only the *exemplum* but also the *Exemplar* of Creation and of the new creation (justification) as well.¹⁰⁷ The ontological dimension of the spouses' conformation to Christ's spousal charity centers on how their collaboration with God is *rooted and made possible* by the sacrament of matrimony as an instrumental cause of grace mediated by Christ's humanity.

The sacramental grace given in matrimony has a christic character; it conforms to the Son as *the* image of the invisible God.¹⁰⁸ Christ's humanity is an instrumental cause of His divinity, such that it modifies, as it were, God's action as the principal cause of grace. Whence, the final result bears the stamp of both the principal agent and the instrument. And since every agent produces its like, Christ's salvific actions produce in us a likeness, first, to Jesus, then, through Him, to God.¹⁰⁹

In this manner, thanks to the grace of the sacrament of matrimony, the spouses' being in God's image is perfected with regard to likeness or, as it were, a second *conformitas*.¹¹⁰ With their collaboration in responsibility, God, as a craftsman, repairs and perfects them according to Christ, *the Exemplar*, in whom the whole truth about man is revealed and brought to fulfillment.¹¹¹ This second conformation, effected in its own way by the sacrament of matrimony and the Christian responsibility of the spouses, perfects the *imago Dei* by bringing to fulfillment the spousal meaning of their bodies.¹¹²

The grace conferred by matrimony is also an aid, to fulfill in justice and truth, all of the obligations contracted in the marriage promises, and expressed materially by the words and actions of the marriage ceremony. This same grace, contained in the *bonum sacramenti*, redimensions the relationship between

106 See Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*. Latin/English Edition of the Works of St. Thomas Aquinas, vols. 33–34, trans. Jeremy Holmes and Beth Mortensen (Lander: The Aquinas Institute, 2013), cap. 24, lect. 4, n. 2003. Henceforth, *Super Mt*.

107 See *ST* III, q. 46, a. 3, c; 1 Pet 2:21.

108 See Col 1:15.

109 See *ST* I, q. 93, a. 5, ad 4. Obviously, to speak of conformity here does not mean equality, but only imitation (see *ST* I–II, q. 19, a. 9, ad 1).

110 See Thomas Aquinas, *De Veritate. On Truth*, trans. R. Schmidt (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1954), q. 22, a. 6, ad 2. Henceforth, *De Veritatae*.

111 See *Super Io.*, cap. 1, lect. 6, n. 149; GS, 22.

112 See TOB 102:4. For a more extensive treatment of this very topic, see Perez-Lopez, *Procreation and the Spousal Meaning of the Body*, 274–284.

spouses. Their ontological conformation to Christ's spousal charity establishes the spouses' friendship with God as the foundation of their supernaturally elevated mutual love and conjugal friendship.

How can one pastorally approach a rekindling of this grace received by the sacrament of matrimony? I think that the answer can be found in a profound idea of John Paul II: the rereading of the language of the body in the truth. By means of this metaphor, the pope brings the married person to relive the outward acts and the words expressive of consent which effect the bond. To reread the language of the body in the truth consists in the spouses *being truthful to their wedding promises by conforming their daily actions to the words of consent*. In this manner, they are faithful to God's plan for human love within marriage. Thus, they are truthful to their particular way of fulfilling the spousal meaning of their bodies. Hence, one could build a whole spirituality for married people based on both a daily meditation on the wedding promises and an examen based on them.¹¹³

V.5. Main Coordinates for Married Spirituality

Such a spirituality would highlight a very crucial point: as Bishop Fulton Sheen wrote, it really does take three to get married.¹¹⁴ The spirituality of marriage is a spirituality about friendship with God and in God. The pastoral care of the conjugal bond must recuperate this central fact by means of the rereading of the language of the body in the truth. God must be at the center of one's marriage. The conjugal friendship that exists between husband and wife at a natural level must be perfected and elevated in charity. Within this spirituality, spouses perfect their being created in God's image, within the ecclesial context of *communio*, by partaking of the missions of the Son and the Holy Spirit.¹¹⁵ This participation brings about their peculiar union in truth and charity with God and each other.¹¹⁶ Allow me to flesh out this understanding of conjugal charity as friendship between Christ and the spouses so as to better understand what are the main coordinates for married spirituality.

113 "[L]a oración y la meditación frecuente del sacramento celebrado es uno de los hilos conductores de la espiritualidad matrimonial. Sólo con la efusión de la gracia del Espíritu Santo, implorada en la celebración litúrgica del sacramento del matrimonio y en la existencia de cada día, los esposos estarán en disposición de custodiar y revelar el amor de Cristo por la Iglesia, en el que han sido insertados." Sarmiento, *El matrimonio cristiano*, 252.

114 See Fulton J. Sheen, *Three to Get Married* (New York: Scepter Publishers, 1996).

115 See Wojtyła, *Sources of Renewal*, 61.

116 See GS, 24.

Thomas Aquinas explains in which sense charity can be understood as friendship:

According to the Philosopher, not every love has the character of friendship, but that love which is together with benevolence, when, to wit, we love someone so as to wish good to him. If, however, we do not wish good to what we love, but wish its good for ourselves, (thus we are said to love wine, or a horse, or the like), it is love not of friendship, but of a kind of concupiscence. For it would be absurd to speak of having friendship for wine or for a horse. Yet neither does well-wishing suffice for friendship, for a certain mutual love is requisite, since friendship is between friend and friend: and this well-wishing is founded on some kind of communication. Accordingly, since there is a communication between man and God, inasmuch as He communicates His happiness to us, some kind of friendship must needs be based on this same communication, of which it is written: “God is faithful: by Whom you are called unto the fellowship of His Son” (1 Cor. 1:9). The love which is based on this communication, is charity: wherefore it is evident that charity is the friendship of man for God.¹¹⁷

The first thing that we need to clarify is that paternity, filiation, brotherhood, and conjugality are different kinds of friendships.¹¹⁸ They all serve as complementary *analogies* to speak of charity as human and divine friendship. Jesus taught us to call God our Father (cf. Matt 6:9). We are God’s children by adoption (cf. Rom 8:15). The only Son of God is said to be our brother, and He is also the Bridegroom of the Church (cf. Rom 8:29; Eph 5:25). Hence, any of these analogies could be considered as contained in Christ’s words: “No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; *but I have called you friends*, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you” (John 15:15. Emphasis added). We are interested now in showing how husband and wife are to grow in friendship with Christ in their conjugal charity.

Based on Aquinas’s text just cited and on Ramirez’s commentary, we can say that this supernatural friendship is a habitual, reciprocal, and mutually known

117 *ST* II–II, q. 23, a. 1, c.

118 For paternity and maternity as friendship see, for example, *In VIII Ethic.*, lect. 12, n. 1706. In turn, for filiation as friendship see, for instance, *ibid.*, lect. 12, n. 1715. Among other texts, brotherhood is also a kind of friendship according to *ibid.*, lect. 11, n. 1695. For marriage as conjugal friendship see, for example, *ibid.*, lect. 11, n. 1694 and GS 48.

benevolence between Christ and the spouses, a benevolence founded upon a certain “*communicatio*.”¹¹⁹ This kind of benevolence, of course, is a habit.¹²⁰ It is not a fixed routine but a firm and stable inclination to love with a creative spontaneity, which also includes ease and delight.¹²¹ We are not talking about a sensible passion nor a spiritual affection of the rational appetite, but rather of an *elective* love of the will, a freely chosen act, whose objects are both the good of the other as well as the good things willed for him.¹²² In this kind of elective love, we have two different objects or *terminus ad quem*, which specify two different kinds of love: 1) the person loved (one’s own self or another), and 2) the “thing” that is loved for this person. We love persons for their own sake and “things” *for persons*.¹²³ Friendship is the habitual form of elective love towards the person of the other, for whom one wills good “things”—understanding by “things” herein any sensible substance or any sensible or spiritual accident.¹²⁴

We can rightly speak of an analogous sense of the word ‘friendship’. It is found first and foremost, not in the love of utility or pleasure, but in the love which aims at the good of the other for its own sake. For this reason, commenting on Aristotle, Aquinas explains that “these [loves] do not differ in kind as three equal species of a genus but are *classified by priority and posteriority*.”¹²⁵ The highest degree of friendship, often called virtuous friendship,¹²⁶ is the one elevated to the supernatural level in our relationship of charity with God. Charity is human and divine friendship in this virtuous sense. The elevation of conjugal love in charity also reorders the motive of the spouses: they love each other in God and because of God.

Spouses begin to experience conjugal charity when they realize that God wills their good for their own sake and does not subordinate His love for them to some sort of usefulness or pleasure. As a matter of fact, it is not possible for God to love them with sheer love of utility because, before God’s infinite perfection, they will always be useless (*achreioi*) servants (cf. Lk 17:10). Whatever good the spouses can give the Lord was given to them by Him

119 See Santiago Ramírez, Ramírez, *De Caritate: In II-II Summae Theologiae Divi Thomae Expositio [QQ. XXIII-XXIV]* (Salamanca: Editorial San Esteban, 1998), 38–39.

120 See *In VIII Ethic.*, lect. 5, nn. 1596, 1603, 1604.

121 See *In III Sent.*, d. 27, q. 2, a. 1, c.

122 See *ST I-II*, q. 26, a. 3, c; *ST II-II*, q. 27, a. 2, c.

123 See Jesús García López, *Tomás de Aquino: Maestro del orden* (Madrid: Ediciones Pedagógicas, 1996), 210–212.

124 See *ST II-II*, q. 25, a. 3, c.

125 *In VIII Ethic.*, lect. 3, n. 1563. Emphasis added. See also *In VIII Ethic.*, lect. 2, n. 1558; *In VIII Ethic.*, lect. 3, n. 1563.

126 See *In VIII Ethic.*, lect. 3, n. 1575.

beforehand (cf. Rom 11:35; 1 Cor 4:7). The concrete way by which God loves the spouses' good for their own sake is by willing their sanctification or salvation, together with the things needed to that end (cf. 1 Thess 4:3; John 3:16–17; 10:10). In this relationship, it was God who loved the spouses first. *His is the initiative; theirs is the responsibility* (cf. 1 John 3:16; Rom 5:8–9; Ga 2:20)¹²⁷ As a result, spouses are called to respond and to love each other *as* Christ has loved them and out of love for Him (cf. John 13:34).

The spouses' friendship with Christ in conjugal charity must be known and reciprocal. As experience testifies, two people “cannot be friends while they are unaware of one another's feelings.”¹²⁸ And friendship is all about loving and being loved. Consequently, “we say friendship is benevolence with corresponding requital inasmuch as the one loving is loved in return.”¹²⁹ Therefore, the spouses' friendship with Christ must be a reciprocal love known to both parties.¹³⁰ That this love is mutually known can be seen from the very words of our Lord in John 10:14: “I am the good shepherd; I know my own and my own know me.” Yet, the question that arises now is in what measure can the spouses will God's good? Although they cannot add any good to God's infinite perfection, they can certainly will to manifest and communicate it. In this way, their marriage is for God's greater glory.¹³¹

Of course, utility and pleasure have their own place in this habitual, reciprocal, and mutually known benevolence between God and the spouses. The highest degree of human friendship integrates utility and pleasure without making of them its main motive. Similarly, the spouses' friendship with God makes them useful to Him under a certain aspect (*secundum quid*). Without usefulness being the main motive for love, in charity, they are useful to the Lord under a certain aspect just as God is useful to them (cf. Tim 2:21; Titus 3:7–8; Wis 8:16). Likewise, we can make a case for pleasure. God's friends delight and rejoice in Him (cf. Psalm 33:9; Phil 4:4). In turn, God is also well-pleased in those who love Him (cf. Prov 8:31).¹³²

The spouses' friendship with Christ is founded upon a certain *communicatio*: “we are made lovers of God by the Holy Spirit.”¹³³ The Spirit conforms the spouses to Christ, making their friendship with Him possible. Moreover, spouses

127 See John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, 29.

128 *In VIII Ethic.*, lect. 2, n. 1560.

129 *In VIII Ethic.*, lect. 2, n. 1559.

130 See *ST* I–II, q. 65, a. 5, c.

131 See *ST* I, q. 19, a. 2, c; II–II, q. 132, a. 1, c.

132 See *SCG* IV. 22.

133 *SCG* IV. 21. See Rom 8:32; *In II Sent.*, d. 26, q. 1, a. 1, ad 2.

collaborate with Him in very distinctive ways, thanks to their procreative *munus*. Such collaboration specifies and colors their friendship.¹³⁴ Thanks to the grace of the Holy Spirit, spouses are adoptive children of God who can share in Christ's *tria munera* within the unique vocation to be married and form a family. Sharing in divine life and in that common *munus*, spouses are called to fellowship (*societas*) with the Son (cf. Eph 3:6; John 14: 23; 1 John 4:16; 1 Cor 1:9). Such a participation brings about a communion of friendship, in which they share secrets with the Lord, and they are of one mind and heart with Him.

Indeed, "friendship seems to exist among people to the extent that they share with one another."¹³⁵ Thus, the spouses' friendship with Christ is also founded upon the communication of secrets. Prayer finds here a prominent place in conjugal spirituality. Aquinas explains: "this is the proper mark of friendship: that one reveals his secrets to his friend. For, since charity unites affections and makes, as it were, one heart of two, one seems not to have dismissed from his heart that which he reveals to a friend."¹³⁶ For this reason, while for some Christ's message appears in parables, the secrets of the Kingdom have been revealed to us (cf. Mk 4:11). No human eye has seen and no human ear has heard what God has prepared for His children; yet, "God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God" (1 Cor 2:9–10).

In turn, spouses are also to have a hidden life in Christ, so as to taste of the intimacy that friends enjoy (cf. Col 3:3). The Holy Spirit conforms them to Christ, making us capable of the contemplation of God and conversation with Him. Accordingly, the Angelic Doctor also explains that "this appears to be especially proper to friendship: really to converse with the friend. Now, the conversation of man with God is by contemplation of Him . . . Since, therefore, the Holy Spirit makes us lovers of God, we are in consequence established by the Holy Spirit as contemplators of God."¹³⁷ Moreover, friendship with Christ consists in a love whereby there is a communication or communion of intellect and will. Spouses are to acquire this sort of concord with the Lord. Indeed, to be of one heart with Christ amounts to having a *communicatio* of intellect and will. Thus, "concord, properly speaking, is between one man and another, in so far as *the wills of various hearts agree together in consenting to the same thing*."¹³⁸

134 See *In VIII Ethic.*, lect. 9, n. 1659.

135 *In VIII Ethic.*, lect. 9, n. 1659.

136 *SCG* IV. 21.

137 *SCG* IV. 22. See Phil 3:20; 2 Cor 3:18.

138 *ST* II–II, q. 29, a. 1, c. Emphasis added.

In this hidden and intimate life in Jesus, in this supernatural friendship with Him, spouses are called to think with the mind of Christ, to have the same feelings as Jesus, to freely will what Christ wills, and to educate accordingly one's thoughts and feelings (1 Cor 2:16). It is proper to friendship to consent to a friend in what he wills. Since the will of God is set forth for us by His precepts, it belongs to the love by which spouses love God in conjugal charity that they fulfill His commandments.¹³⁹ Jesus' words are also applicable to those who are married and are called to live in conjugal charity: "You are my friends if you do what I command you" (John 15:14). The Lord is asking the spouses to make a gift of their own will first and foremost to Him. He is asking the same kind of spousal love He has shown by suffering and dying for the Church (cf. Eph 5:25). The gratuitous initiative belongs to God; the responsibility belongs to the spouses.

The love with which spouses relate with Christ is the measure with which they are to love themselves and each other. They are to love themselves by willing the goods they need in order to attain salvation. And they are to love each other in the same way they are to love themselves. Of course, it is common experience that one's vocation to marriage is filled with difficulties. It is also possible that one's husband or one's wife becomes a sort of unjust aggressor or enemy. What does conjugal charity require then? This scenario reveals very clearly that, in conjugal charity, spouses love each other in God and because of God.

Jesus clearly taught that Christians have the power of grace and the obligation to love those who are unjust towards them (cf. Luke 6:32–36; Matt 5:46–48). Obviously, Christ does not mean that his followers are to be masochists who enjoy being ill-treated. No one can really love his enemy as such, as an enemy. A wife should not love her husband inasmuch as he is unfaithful to her, abuses her, or abandons her and her children. In reality, "this is perverse, and contrary to charity, since it implies love of that which is evil in another."¹⁴⁰ However, conjugal charity offers a way of loving such a husband *for God's sake*.

Imagine the following scenario. I am contacted by a dear friend of mine, Anthony, who asks me if I could host one of his friends, John. I accept. Then, when John is at my house, he begins to ill-treat me. My friendship with Anthony is going to be put to the test. If we are not very good friends, John will be justly expelled from my house. However, if Anthony and I are really good friends, then, out of my friendship for Anthony, I will love John even if he is unfriendly towards me. Thomas uses a similar example: "if we loved a certain man very much, we would love his children though they were unfriendly towards us."¹⁴¹

139 See *SCG* IV. 22. See John 14:15; Rom 8:14.

140 *ST* II–II, q. 25, a. 8, c.

141 *Ibid.*

In the case of an unfaithful husband or wife, no Christian spouse is required to love them as unjust aggressors, as enemies so to speak. However, a Christian spouse is called to love his wife or her husband because of their friendship with God. And this is the way in which the spirituality of conjugal charity is able to deal with the most difficult scenarios in married life.

VI. AL'S CHAPTER 8 AND THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE BOND

Pope Francis opens Chapter Eight with a clear programmatic paragraph, in which he declares the main goal of the entire chapter. The Church is like “a field hospital.” She welcomes those who suffered a “breach of the marriage bond,” with the clear goals of facilitating an encounter with God’s mercy, restoring in them hope and confidence, and empowering them with the courage to do good.¹⁴² But AL has already established that one effective way of accomplishing these goals is the pastoral care of the bond and the spirituality of conjugal charity.¹⁴³ Moreover, let us remember that, according to Pope Francis himself, “everything written in *Amoris Laetitia* is Thomistic, from beginning to end.”¹⁴⁴ Consequently, our previous Thomistic theological reflection on the conjugal bond and charity under the paradigm of friendship should shed light onto some of the key questions raised by this chapter.

The process of accompaniment outlined by AL must take into account the question of gradualness. Pope Francis makes a direct reference to FC’s teachings in this regard.¹⁴⁵ Thus, under the light of the principle of integration, we should recall as a hermeneutical key that “an educational growth process is necessary, in order that individual believers, families and peoples, even civilization itself, by beginning from what they have already received of the mystery of Christ, may patiently be led forward, arriving at a richer understanding and a fuller integration of this mystery in their lives.”¹⁴⁶ As John Paul II explains, “married people too are called upon to progress unceasingly in their moral life, with the support of a sincere and active desire to gain ever better knowledge of the values enshrined in and fostered by the law of God.”¹⁴⁷ Yet, married people “must also be supported by an upright and generous willingness to embody

142 See AL, 291.

143 See AL, 211.

144 Pope Francis, *Address at the Opening of the Pastoral Congress of the Diocese of Rome* (June 16, 2016).

145 See AL, 295. Pope Francis refers directly to FC, 9; 34.

146 FC, 9.

147 FC, 34.

these values in their concrete decisions. *They cannot however look on the law as merely an ideal to be achieved in the future*: they must consider it as a command of Christ the Lord to overcome difficulties with constancy.”¹⁴⁸

John Paul II and Pope Francis accept the law of gradualness. But both plainly reject the gradualness of the law. In fact, AL states clearly: “This is not a ‘gradualness of the law.’”¹⁴⁹ Pope Francis is rejecting a view that proposes that there are “different degrees or forms of precepts in God’s law for different individuals and situations. In God’s plan, all husbands and wives are called in marriage to holiness, and this lofty vocation is fulfilled to the extent that the human person is able to respond to God’s command with serene confidence in God’s grace and in his or her own will.”¹⁵⁰

In light of these clarifications, we can understand that when welcoming those who are far away, it is important to acknowledge whatever is really good in their lives. For instance, a couple in a civil marriage is in a better situation than those who merely cohabit. Another example: there can be authentic signs of love in people who, for many different reasons, are not yet sacramentally married. Although there is an undeniable objective evil in these situations, pastors should also consider that, for the most part, couples who sin in these ways are not motivated by malice against the sacrament of marriage. Rather, they are somewhat ignorant of its value and they are pressured by socio-economic factors.¹⁵¹

Pastors should not condemn someone forever, having no charity and no mercy. In their judgments, they are to take into account the complexity of existential and concrete situations.¹⁵² To be sure, if a person has incurred in an objective sin, the Church cannot abandon this person in that profound state of misery. It would be contrary to mercy to do such a thing. For this reason, Pope Francis explains that, “such a person needs to listen once more to the Gospel message and *its call to conversion*.”¹⁵³ For this listening-process to take place, this person needs to be involved in some way in the life of the Church. The examples given by the Pope are not exhaustive but they are quite indicative. No sacrament is mentioned. AL means things like “social service” or “prayer meetings.”¹⁵⁴

148 Ibid. Emphasis added.

149 AL, 295.

150 FC, 34.

151 See AL, 292–294.

152 See AL, 296.

153 AL, 297. Emphasis added.

154 Ibid.

At this point, AL begins to address the special situation of those who are divorced and remarried. The document invites pastors to look at the circumstances around each case. Without denying the objective evil involved, there can be a situation in which separation is not good for the children that are the fruit of the second union. Moreover, it would be incorrect to forbid all divorced and remarried people every kind of participation in the life of the Church. They are not excommunicated. The same would apply to thieves, adulterers, envious, or proud members of the Church. Their sins are mortal *ex genere suo*. Yet, the Church is always ready to welcome them in Her mercy and to call them to conversion. It is true that, depending upon circumstances, the degree of responsibility in each case could be different. Objectively speaking, those sins are all grave matter. Subjectively speaking, it is quite difficult to determine the exact degree of responsibility of each moral agent. As the Council of Trent explains: “no one can know with a certitude of faith that cannot be subject to error that he has obtained God’s grace.”¹⁵⁵ Hence, it would be rash and even dangerous, for a priest to judge the state of grace of another.¹⁵⁶

In all truth, “it is possible that in an objective situation of sin—which may not be subjectively culpable, or fully such—a person can be living in God’s grace, can love and can also grow in the life of grace and charity, *while receiving the Church’s help to this end*.”¹⁵⁷ This is certainly a possibility. But no one can know that with the certainty of faith. Hence, the needed help from the Church must begin with listening to the Gospel message, with a call to conversion, and with the sacrament of reconciliation. In fact, the footnote to the last text cited has been the object of some controversy. Yet, in reality, it explains the correct path to follow: “In certain cases, this can include the help of the sacraments. Hence, ‘I want to remind priests that the confessional must not be a torture chamber, but rather an encounter with the Lord’s mercy’. I would also point out that the Eucharist ‘is not a prize for the perfect, but a powerful medicine and nourishment for the weak.’”¹⁵⁸

Clearly, Pope Francis recommends the help of the sacraments in some cases. The cases in which this help is possible are to be determined, above all, by the

155 Denz., 1534. Saint Thomas Aquinas explains that there are three ways in which a person may know he or she is in the state of grace. First, one could know it by private revelation. Second, by oneself, one can never know with certitude that he or she is in that state. Third, without a private revelation, one can only conjecture by signs such as being conscious of delighting in God, despising worldly things, and not being aware of having committed a mortal sin. See *ST* I-II, q. 112, a. 5, c.

156 See Thomas Aquinas, *Super Rom.*, cap. 2, lect. 1, n. 174.

157 AL, 305. Emphasis added.

158 AL, 305, footnote 351.

listening to the Gospel message and the call to conversion. Those who accept such a call are to first receive the sacrament of reconciliation. AL reminds priests, in this context, that this sacrament should welcome the penitent and facilitate an encounter with God's mercy. Once this encounter has taken place, thanks to an authentic purpose of amendment, then the Eucharist could be given. At that time, the Eucharist can be true and effective medicine.

In reality, the guiding principle of this entire chapter is the notion of mercy.¹⁵⁹ As is known, to be merciful is to exercise one peculiar kind of benevolence specified by its material object: it consists in willing a good for another that alleviates or destroys his or her misery, namely, everything that is an obstacle to salvation. It is of the utmost importance to realize that Pope Francis is not saying that, in some cases, the unrepentant divorced and remarried persons could receive communion. In fact, that would be diametrically opposed to mercy. Instead of alleviating or destroying their misery, that practice will sink them even further into the abyss of their sins, adding one more: sacrilege. Any pastor who practices that approach is not being merciful. Rather, he is being a mercenary who takes an easy solution, which instead of leading the sheep to Christ, abandons them to the wolves.

Without a doubt, the path outlined by Pope Francis is a path of mercy and for merciful pastors; it is not a path for mercenaries. In indicating that one should go first to confession and then receive the Eucharist, AL 305 is emphasizing a merciful and pastoral view already present in FC 84 and *Sacramentum Caritatis* 29. There can be no absolution without purpose of amendment. Only after absolution can the Eucharist be an effective medicine for the weak because "there are medicines which, if taken prematurely, do more harm than good."¹⁶⁰ However, there is another important emphasis in AL, which must not be overlooked. Where can these wounded members of the Church find the needed strength and grace to resolve to live in continence, as brothers and sisters? According to AL's teachings, for validly married people, the answer must be found in the spirituality of the bond and the conjugal charity that is the specific effect of the sacrament of matrimony. This can also be true in the case in which one of the spouses has been unjustly wronged. The marital bond exists (until the death of one of the spouses) to grant the needed graces to live in that state of life. Thus, it also contains the needed graces to live in continence and be a remedy for concupiscence. Such continence can be lived out of love for Christ, as a fulfillment of the spousal meaning of our bodies. For this to happen, one needs to foster that supernatural friendship that was previously explained.

¹⁵⁹ See AL, 309.

¹⁶⁰ Granados, Kampowski, and Pérez-Soba, *Accompanying, Discerning, Integrating*, 79.

I believe that this is the correct application of Pope Francis’s valuable indications and of one of AL’s most profound theological jewels. Within the context of this difficult scenario, we cannot lose sight of the fact that the pastoral care of “married couples *should be centered on the marriage bond, assisting couples not only to deepen their love but also to overcome problems and difficulties.*”¹⁶¹ This bond (*vinculum*) is a dispositive cause of grace. Even if the spouses are separated or have entered into a different union, the bond still exists until one of them dies. It can and should be made the object of pastoral care in order to help the parties involved in growing in charity and in overcoming problems and difficulties. This can be a great source of grace to fulfill the good of fidelity. Indeed, as Pope Francis reminds us, God makes His way possible “*to assume the goods of marriage as commitments that can be better kept through the help of the grace of the sacrament.*”¹⁶²

Faith assures us that this is possible. It is not a utopia. God will always give us this grace if we are willing to collaborate with it. Let us recall once again those words filled with *gravitas*: “The marriage bond finds new forms of expression and *constantly seeks new ways to grow in strength.* These both preserve and strengthen the bond. They call for *daily effort.* None of this, however, is possible without praying to the Holy Spirit for an outpouring of his *grace*, his supernatural strength and his spiritual fire, to *confirm, direct and transform our love in every new situation.*”¹⁶³

VI. CONCLUSION

This article has shown that conjugal charity, understood as human and divine friendship, is a fruitful theological paradigm to articulate both the specific grace of the sacrament of matrimony as well as the pastoral care and spirituality of the bond as *res et sacramentum*. Read in light of the principle of integration, AL offers precious indications for the pastoral care of the conjugal bond and for married spirituality. Such indications are also inestimable to understand the passages in Chapter 8 concerning the divorced and the remarried.

Now, this article could be considered as a mere introduction to a greater theological exploration. Indeed, it would be important to reflect theologically on the metaphysical status of the marriage bond and on its causality with respect to the specific grace of the sacrament of matrimony.

161 AL, 211. Emphasis added.

162 AL, 73. Emphasis added.

163 AL, 164. Emphasis added.

