
Increase and Multiply

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One of the most effective ways of destroying anything is to change the specific purposes for which it was created. It is very important then for institutions to preserve their specific purposes firm, if they are to survive and be faithful to the principles giving them life. When we are dealing with institutions that have their immediate origin in the divine will, whether they be of the supernatural order as in the case of the Church, or whether they be of the natural order as in the case of marriage, any attempt to make them turn away from their specific purposes is a serious attack against the order established by God. Consequently such attempts are bound to end in barren frustration.

For some years now there have been a number of more or less widespread theories which, under the pretext of bestowing greater dignity on marital love, attempt to reverse the purposes of marriage. This attempt necessarily affects the very nature of marriage which these purposes are essentially related to.

It is important to have clear ideas about the doctrine of the Church concerning marriage. By being familiar with the principles involved, we can see that these other opinions are arbitrary. The purposes of marriage are intimately tied up with the other essential properties of this institution. If one of the elements of this delicately balanced structure is tampered with, the whole is bound to collapse sooner or later.

The purposes of marriage

Since it is an institution of divine origin, marriage has specific purposes which correspond to the order established by God. As is logical, since we are dealing with a reality of the natural order, these purposes are valid for any type of lawful marriage and not only for marriage between Catholics. That is, they do not refer only to marriage as a sacrament. Therefore the legal norms which refer to marriage ought to be a faithful reflection of an essential order that lies above and beyond human will and which has determined the purposes of matrimony once and for all. Hence if any human law did not safeguard the purposes which God intended by instituting marriage, it would not be a just or binding law. "Every law has the nature of laws just to the extent that it is derived from the law of nature. But if in any point it departs from the law of nature, it is no longer a law but a perversion of law." ¹ Ecclesiastical law, of course, expressly endorses the purposes of marriage laid down by divine and natural law. "The primary purpose of marriage is the procreation and education of children;" says the Code of Canon Law; "Its secondary purpose is mutual help and a remedy for concupiscence." ²

Revelation is explicit with regard to the natural purposes of marriage and speaks of them in clear terms. Thus in Genesis, after recounting the creation of man and woman, the reason for the differences of the sexes is indicated. God blessed man and woman and said: "Increase and multiply and fill

the earth" (Gen 1:28). In humanity's state of original righteousness, there was no reference to a remedy for concupiscence, since the lower passions were then subject to reason. However the aspect of mutual help was included, and there is a specific reference to it in the biblical text. "It is not good for man to be alone. Let us make him a helper fit for him" (Gen 2:18). This mutual help must be understood as a purpose proper to marriage although subordinate to its primary purpose, and therefore as something to be achieved only in marriage and not outside of it. Otherwise, there would be no particular difference between this kind of help and any which might be given by people not united in marriage and which equally could be considered as mutual help. In other words, the help that is given in marriage is bound up with the specific purpose of matrimony, namely the procreation and education of children.

In other passages of Scripture we find reference to a remedy for concupiscence. For example, after having praised virginity St. Paul says in the epistle to the Corinthians: "But if they do not have self-control, let them marry. For it is better to marry than to burn" (I Cor 7:9).

The begetting of children is a natural purpose of the union between husband and wife when they are capable of procreation and when they do nothing to frustrate the marriage act. Whenever an institution has its own specific and natural end, that purpose necessarily has to be the primary and principal intention of the creator of that institution, since "the purpose of each and every being is that which is intended by its author."³ This in effect is what Scripture shows clearly. The "increase and multiply" expresses in crystal-clear fashion the immediate and principal purpose which God intended in instituting marriage. To think of a different primary purpose would entail contravening not only revelation, but also what human logic itself indicates to be the natural purpose of marriage, namely procreation.

Whenever there is a principal purpose for something, everything related to that purpose must be measured and determined by it.⁴ Therefore since procreation is the primary goal of marriage, it follows that procreation should be the factor which gives unity and coherence to marital life. It also follows that married life should be integrally ordered toward achieving its primary purpose. In other words, everything about marriage ought to be directed to the primary purpose of marriage, not only the right to the marital act, but also the community of life of the spouses, the mutual help that they find therein, and the remedy for concupiscence.

The primacy of procreation over other purposes of marriage has been stated often by the Magisterium. For example, Pius XI says: "Christian marriage is intended not only for the spiritual union and temporal good of the spouses, but above all God intends it for the begetting of children, so that the human race might grow and fill the earth in fulfillment of the divine command."⁵ It is the same doctrine that was expounded previously in the encyclical *Casti Connubii*.

In the past a number of theories have been imposed on our civilization which, while differing slightly from each other, are openly opposed to the traditional teaching of the Church. According to these authors, the procreative purpose of marriage should be de-emphasized so as to put greater stress on the communion of the spouses in their love as an expression and enrichment of their personality. Through this personal union the mutual perfection of husband and wife could be achieved. This union

would be the real sense of married life, and it (they say) should be considered the center or primary purpose of marriage.

These theories begin by changing clear and precise terminology. Instead of speaking about “purposes” they introduce other expressions such as “sense” or “motive” of marriage. This lack of precision in terms leads to confusion of ideas, although in practice the mutual help of the spouses comes to be taken, according to these opinions, as the primary purpose.

It is easy to understand why such a turn-about, openly opposed to Catholic doctrine, was condemned by the Magisterium. All works containing these theories were ordered to be withdrawn from circulation. A decree of the Holy Office dated April 1, 1944, answered the following query: "Whether opinions of some recent authors, who either deny that the main purpose of marriage is the procreation and education of children, or who teach that the secondary aims are not essentially subordinated to the primary purpose but rather are equally essential and independent, can be admitted as correct." The reply was negative to both parts of the query.⁶ Two months later, on June 26, 1944, the Vatican published in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* an opinion which had been given at the beginning of that same year, wherein the question of the purposes of marriage had been examined and the traditional doctrine was once more upheld.

In spite of everything, erroneous opinions have not stopped circulating and they now surface with new arguments. For example, they speak of husband and wife as two beings who, despite different physiological and emotional traits, are called to mutual understanding and perfection. This mutuality would come about through the complete giving of each person that is achieved basically in the marriage act, which is thus carried out independently from any other more fundamental purpose. This same idea is advanced again when its proponents speak of the mutual help of the spouses.

At best, we might think that they are attempting to redeem the secondary purposes of marriage as if the doctrine of the Church had kept them in the dark, or that, by being subordinated to the main purpose, the perfection of the spouses would be impeded. To be sure, to subordinate something to its main purpose does not degrade it. Rather the opposite happens. The goodness and perfection of a secondary purpose is not fulfilled by itself, but can only be attained when people practice it not as an end in itself but rather as a means to its main purpose. Anything contrary to this conclusion would be a violation of reason.

It makes no sense to speak of the mutual perfection of man and wife while evading its essential subordination to the main purpose, by which the secondary purposes also attain their perfection. This is evident since, without seeking the will of God who has established the procreation and education of children as the main purpose, there is no possible secondary perfection. When children are willfully excluded, the selfishness which motivates that decision undermines everything. This same selfishness leads husband and wife to exclude other demands of mutual help.

Moreover, the Church's doctrine has never looked down on the importance of the secondary aims, but rather has given them their due merit. In an address given to the Roman Rota (the marriage court of the Holy See) in October 1941, Pius XII insisted on the necessity of not proceeding "as if the secondary

purpose did not exist, or at least as if it were not an objective aim (*finis operis*) established by the same Designer of nature." He also cautioned that one could not consider "the secondary purpose as equally important, by separating it from its essential subordination to the primary purpose, for this would inexorably lead to disastrous consequences."⁷

Thus the serious error of inverting the purposes of marriage, and concretely making the perfection of the spouses the first and principal purpose, has always been denounced by the Church. "Marriage as an institution of nature, in virtue of the Creator's will, has not as a primary and intimate end the personal perfection of the married couple, but the procreation and upbringing of new life. The other ends, inasmuch as they are intended by nature, are not equally primary, much less superior to the primary end, but are essentially subordinated to it. This is true of every marriage, even if no offspring result; just as of every eye it can be said that it is destined and formed to see even if, in abnormal cases arising from special internal or external conditions, it will never be possible to achieve visual perception."⁸ We will return to this point in the following section.

Furthermore, in the case of Christian marriage, we must not forget that we are not dealing merely with procreation on a purely human level, but that there is another factor of a transcendent and supernatural character involved, namely that children increase the fold of the Church. "Christian parents must see that they are destined not only to propagate and to conserve the human race on earth. . . but to give offspring to the Church of Christ, to procreate fellow citizens of the saints and members of the household of God."⁹

The education of the offspring is just as important, since it forms a unity with the procreative purpose. This is the constant teaching of the Magisterium. Otherwise "the all-wise God would not have sufficiently provided for the children, and consequently for the whole human race, had he not assigned the right and duty to educate to the same ones to whom he had given the power and the right to procreate."¹⁰ Since it is part of the primary purpose, raising children, just like procreation, has an influence on the whole of married life. This is one of the reasons why it is contrary to the natural order of things to legalize any situation, namely divorce, which is an obstacle to the upbringing of children.

Understanding mutual help

What do we understand by "mutual help"? Basically it refers to sharing the care, concern, and work of making the family and home a living reality. Both husband and wife make their own specific contribution in such a way that through their reciprocal help "they progress daily more and more in virtue, and they grow above all in true charity with God and with neighbor."¹¹

Besides the obligations specified in the law of the Church, namely the habitual sharing of bed, board, and home,¹² in real life this mutual help consists of countless details that cannot be enumerated in a rigid list of rights and duties. They are more than anything fruit of the love between husband and wife.

On the other hand, there are some who would restrict the concept of mutual help to that perfection which husband and wife achieve in the marriage act. This perfection would come about as a direct

physical effect of the marriage act in which the spouses complement one another. Thus instead of reciprocal help, they speak about mutual complement; and they claim that this is the prime purpose of marriage. They mistakenly maintain that sexuality is an inclination between persons of the opposite sex to complement one another reciprocally in the marital act. This view cannot be upheld because it ignores the objective hierarchy which exists between the primary aim and the other purposes of marriage. Further it is obvious that by its very nature the conjugal act is ordered to procreation as its main purpose and not to what has been called a mutual complement, for the direct effect of the conjugal union is to furnish the necessary elements so that procreation can take place. Therefore sex, in the order established by God, is intended immediately and principally for the union of husband and wife so as to give rise to children.

On the other hand, it is also clear that true personal perfection is not tied to the sexual union. If this were true, then only in marriage would it be possible to achieve personal development. This theory is in plain disagreement with revealed doctrine, as, for example, when the Lord affirms the superiority of virginity "for the kingdom of Heaven" over marriage.¹³ Even on the natural level, human perfection consists in the proper use of man's higher faculties, namely intellect and will.

However, the true fullness to which we are all called by God, including those living in the married state, cannot be achieved except with the use of supernatural means and by directing our actions to our last end. Hence we can speak of a good action, one capable of perfecting us, only insofar as it is subordinated to our last end and to other intermediate ends. In other words, husband and wife truly perfect each other if, while using supernatural means, they respect the main purpose of marriage. Only then, when the secondary purposes are rightly ordered, does marriage keep its inherent good. In the last analysis then, husband and wife will perfect each other by means of the marriage act only insofar as they seek the main purpose to which it is ordained and thus act in conformity with the will of God.

This very same doctrine has been reaffirmed by the Second Vatican Council when it states that "by their very nature, the institution of matrimony itself and conjugal love are ordained for the procreation and education of children, and find in them their ultimate crown."¹⁴

Redirecting concupiscence

Everyone knows by personal experience that he carries within himself the seeds of disorder, the remains of sin, as a consequence of original sin. Man knows from experience that it is hard to control his actions according to right reason. That is, he finds it hard to direct himself to the real good which will take him to Heaven, instead of pursuing something which is only a temporary good.

Since original sin, the sexual instinct, as well as the other appetites, can deviate from the true course which reason indicates. Then they direct themselves to a good which really cannot be considered a good, since it leads man away from Heaven. And so the right order of the sexual instinct must be established in accordance with the purpose for which God put it in human nature.

Before original sin our first parents would have desired the conjugal act without feeling any need to seek a remedy for concupiscence and they would have sought the good of procreation¹⁵ without the sexual instincts being an occasion of sin. Afterward however, this instinct, intended by nature as a stimulus for procreation, can be veered from its real purpose and directed more or less to the attainment of sensual pleasure. Therefore God provided a special help within marriage so that sexual union might be carried out rightly as a function of a higher good. The sexual instinct must be channeled properly and the marriage act carried out in such a way as to avoid unchastity. This goal is possible because of the goods of marriage which free the marriage act from any taint of sin.¹⁶

The act which by nature is the source of new life is a viable remedy for concupiscence—not a provocation of it—only when it is carried out according to the divine order, that is within marriage and without hindering the ultimate end to which it should be ordained. All of this is summed up in the following words of the encyclical *Casti Connubii*. "In marriage as well as in the use of the matrimonial rights, there are also secondary ends, such as mutual help, the fostering of mutual love, and the quieting of lust, which husband and wife are not forbidden to seek as long as they are subordinated to the primary end and as long as the intrinsic nature of the act is preserved."¹⁷

Moral consequences

Catholic doctrine regarding the nature and purposes of marriage leads to a series of practical consequences in the moral order, which can be summed up as follows.

The conjugal act is intended by God for the transmission of life. Since it has this prime purpose, procreation, one cannot deprive the act of this purpose, if one intends to respect the laws which apply to it. "The use of sex is morally lawful only in marriage, in subordination to the purposes of marriage itself and according to the nature of these purposes." It is therefore "essentially and totally subordinated and ordained to that unique, great law of the procreation and education of children, namely the fulfillment of the primary purpose of marriage as the origin and source of life."¹⁸ St. Augustine has harsh words for those who would frustrate the transmission of life. "Intercourse even with one's legitimate wife is unlawful and wicked where the conception of offspring is prevented. Onan, the son of Judah, did this; and the Lord killed him for it."¹⁹

Pius XI pointed out that "there is simply no means by which something intrinsically against nature may become conformable to nature and morally good. Since therefore the conjugal act is destined primarily by nature for the begetting of children, those who in exercising it deliberately frustrate its natural power and purpose sin against nature and commit a deed which is shameful and intrinsically vicious."²⁰

The very same doctrine is found in the most recent documents of the Magisterium and especially in the encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, which reaffirms once more "that every marriage act must remain open to the transmission of life."²¹ These principles are absolutely inviolable; "this command continues to have the same force today as in times past and will hold forever, because it is not simply a precept of human law but the expression of a law that is both natural and divine."²²

Therefore any action of the spouses that interferes with the proper purpose of the conjugal act which ought always to be open to the transmission of life is morally unlawful. Hence all actions that would lead to sterilization, whether final or temporary, whether of the man or of the woman, are unlawful. Likewise every action is to be considered unlawful which, either in anticipation of the conjugal act, or in its accomplishment, or in the development of its natural consequences, whether as an end or as a means, aims at making procreation impossible.²³ This excludes then as morally unlawful anything that blocks the growth process of the reproductive cells and specifically of the ovum by administering anovulatory drugs, as well as the use of any mechanism which prevents conception.

Moreover, the direct interruption of the generative process already begun, and willed and procured abortion, even if for therapeutic reasons, is unlawful.²⁴

It is a fact that many countries have recourse to abortion as a means of population control, and many civil authorities have legalized the practice. They thus reject the truth that "every human being, and also the child while yet in the maternal womb, has the right to life given to him immediately by God and not by his parents, nor by any social class nor any human authority. Therefore no person nor any human authority, whether in the name of science or under the pretext of any medical, eugenic, social, financial, or moral 'indication,' has any right to dispose directly of innocent human life. They have no right to take innocent life, either as an end sought in itself or as a means to attain another end which perhaps in itself is lawful."^{25 2}

These are the moral principles governing the transmission of life. Unfortunately they are not respected when "on the basis of estimated calculations one attempts to mechanize people's consciences. Whence public measures to regulate births, the pressure of administrative offices of so-called social security, the influence brought to bear through public opinion. . . organizations inspired by cold calculation, in their attempt to confine life within the narrow limits of fixed charts as if life were a static phenomenon, become negative and offensive to life itself and to its essential character which is a constant dynamism given to it by nature."²⁶ So we can truly say that "our present-day world will not be saved by men who aim to drug spiritual life and reduce everything to a question of economics or material well-being. Our world's salvation will come from men and women who know that morality is geared to man's eternal destiny, who have faith in God, and who generously face the demands of their faith, helping those around them to appreciate the transcendental meaning of our life on Earth."²⁷

Only in certain circumstances, for serious reasons, is it lawful to regulate birth by having recourse to infertile periods which occur in a woman according to natural cycles. In such cases the conjugal act, limited to days of natural sterility, is not perverted. However there must be proportionately grave reasons to use marriage only in the infertile periods. Only very serious motives could avoid the degradation of a love depending on the calendar. This is a fundamental requirement that is often forgotten. If there are no serious reasons, having recourse to the infertile periods would also be morally unlawful because "the mere fact that husband and wife do not offend the nature of the act and are even ready to accept and bring up a child who, notwithstanding their precautions, might be born would not be itself sufficient to guarantee the rectitude of their intention and the unobjectionable morality of their motives."²⁸

The documents of the Magisterium always use expressions which themselves indicate that there must be some serious situation in order to have lawful recourse to the infertile periods. Such expressions are, for example: "serious and grave motives," "grave reasons—personal or deriving from external circumstances."²⁹

The regulation of birth must be looked on in a very restrictive way. It requires asking in every case whether there be motives serious enough to warrant its use. It is not a generic solution that can be left to the arbitrary decision of married couples or used indiscriminately. It will only be lawful in cases when special circumstances exist. This is a delicate question that cannot be answered without recourse to prayer and the sacraments, so as not to cloud the judgment of conscience.

In recent years opinions have been bandied about in the press that urge a confrontation between the individual conscience and the doctrinal principles that are involved in this question. They object that the principles and doctrinal guidelines of the Magisterium in this matter are not infallible. With this argument they would put the judgment of individual conscience above the decisions of an authority which, by the will of Christ, is the teacher of the truth and whose mission it is to teach and proclaim the truth authentically and to declare those principles of the moral order which have their origins in human nature itself.³⁰

Any personal difficulties have to be resolved in the light of the doctrinal principles taught by the Church, with the help of divine grace and a well-formed conscience. The decision of the married couple, after having weighed things well, ought never to be in disagreement with moral principles regarding marriage. This is so because "spouses cannot proceed arbitrarily, but must always be governed according to a conscience dutifully conformed to divine law itself, and should be submissive toward the Church's teaching office, which authentically interprets that law in the light of the Gospel," says the Second Vatican Council. Paul VI recalled this same doctrine when commenting on this Council document. The judgment of the spouses ought always to respect the moral norms laid down by the Church, since "in the observance of divine law, God has entrusted to their responsible choice the task and the joy of transmitting life, and nobody can exempt himself from this law nor restrict the will of God."³²

Only within this framework can we find the real meaning of responsible parenthood. Married couples must take into account the lofty mission to which God calls them as cooperators of his love. In considering this great responsibility, they must act in accordance with their mission. Responsible parenthood ought not to be a restraint, but rather a calling to correspond to divine love with the greatest generosity.

Then we see the reason for words of praise for large families. "Among the couples who fulfill their God-given task, those merit special mention who with a gallant heart, and with wise and common deliberation, undertake to bring up suitably even a relatively large family."³³ Responsible parenthood means not only refraining from contraception, but also parents dedicating themselves wholeheartedly to the upbringing of children and to a truly Christian home. In the last analysis, "it is not the number of children by itself that is the decisive factor. The fact of having few or many children does not on its

own make a family more or less Christian. What matters is the honesty and integrity with which married life is lived."³⁴

The doctrinal principles regarding the nature and the purpose of marriage may seem very demanding. However we must not forget that God, the author of nature, does not subject it to laws that are impossible to fulfill. We must also keep in mind that marriage is not a second-rate calling that makes it easier to live a Christian life. All people, without exception, are called to personal sanctity. To attain it, they have all the necessary graces, each within his own state in life. Moreover Christian married couples have the specific grace of the sacrament to enable them to live better the duties proper to their state. To see only the difficulties without taking into account the supernatural means that God provides for overcoming those difficulties, is the very opposite of a Christian outlook on life.

¹ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I-II, q. 95, a. 2, c.

² Code of Canon Law, c. 1013, 1.

³ St. Thomas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, I, c. 1.

⁴ Cf. St. Thomas, *Summa Theologica*, I-II, q. 102, a. 1.

⁵ *Motu proprio, Qua Cura*, A.A.S. 30 (1938), p. 410.

⁶ A.A.S. 36 (1944), p. 103; Denz. 2295.

⁷ Pius XII, Address to the Judges of the Rota', A.A.S. 33 (1941), p. 425.

⁸ Pius XII, Address to Midwives, Oct. 29, 1951.

⁹ Pius XI, Encyclical *Casti Connubii*, Denz. 2229; cf. Paul VI, Address, Feb. 12, 1966.

¹⁰ Pius XI, *op. cit.*, Denz. 2230.

¹¹ Pius XI, *op. cit.*, Denz. 2232.

¹² Cf. Code of Canon Law, c. 1128.

¹³ Cf. Mt 19:12; Pius XII, Address, Sept. 15, 1952, Denz. 2341; Encyclical *Sacra virginitas*, Feb. 25, 1954.

¹⁴ Constitution *Gaudium et spes*, n. 48; cf n. 50; Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, no. 11.

¹⁵ Cf. St. Thomas, *Summa Theologica*, Supl., q. 42, a 2, c.

¹⁶ Cf. St. Thomas, *ibid.*, a. 3, ad 4.

¹⁷ Pius XI, *op. cit.*, Denz. 2241.

¹⁸ Pius XII, Address to Midwives.

¹⁹ *De coniugatione adultorum*, 2, 12.

²⁰ Pius XI, *op. cit.*, Denz. 2239.

²¹ Paul VI, *Encyclical Humanae Vitae*, no. 11.

²² Pius XII, *Address to Midwives*.

²³ Cf. Paul VI, *Encyclical Humanae Vitae*, no. 11, 14.

²⁴ Cf. Paul VI, *ibid.*, no. 14.

²⁵ Pius XII *Address to Midwives*.

²⁶ Pius XII, *Christmas Message, 1952*.

²⁷ *Conversations with Msgr. Escrivá de Balaguer*, no. 95.

²⁸ Pius XII, *Address to Midwives*; Denz. 2336.

²⁹ Cf. Pius XII, *Address to Midwives*; Paul VI, *Encyclical Humanae Vitae*, *passim*.

³⁰ Cf. *Vatican Council II, Dignitatis humanae*, no. 14.

³¹ *Constitution Gaudium et spes*, no. 50.

³² Paul VI, *Address*, Feb. 12, 1966.

³³ *Constitution Gaudium et spes*, no. 50.

³⁴ *Conversations with Msgr. Escrivá de Balaguer*, no. 94.

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