

Christ In The Home

Booklet 1. Part 2.

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Meditations on Marriage and the Bible. Marriage and Sacraments.

MARRIAGE AND THE BIBLE. (1)

I. The Law of Union.

HOW marvelous is the description of the creation of man and woman, which the book of Genesis gives us.

God has created the universe. He has hurled worlds into space. Among all these worlds is the earth and on it are all the splendors of the mineral world, the plant world, and the animal world. Each time God sent forth some new creature from His creative Hands, He paused and said, "It is good!" God saw that it was good.

Yes, all of that creation is but a framework, a pedestal. Whom does He intend to place within that framework, upon that pedestal?

Man.

Look at Adam. He has intelligence, free will, and a heart.

A heart — the power to love. But to whom will man direct that power of love which God has placed in him?

God placed all of creation "beneath his feet." But what does it mean for man to have everything beneath his feet if he has no one to clasp to his heart? God understood man. That is why the Most High is not satisfied upon the completion of His masterpiece. He does not say as He did after each preceding creation, "It is good," but He says, "It is not good for man to be alone."

Therefore, the Most High, the divine Sculptor, chisel in hand approaches His masterpiece to attack the marble anew; he lays open its side and from the avenues to the heart removes a part; this part of Adam, He forms into woman. A magnificent indication of how close must be the union between husband and wife! A union of wonderful strength, engendered by love and for love! Saint Thomas explains that "God took the substance with which He formed woman close to the heart of man. He did not take it from the head for she is not made to dominate. Neither did he take it from man's feet, for she is not made for servitude. He took it near the heart because she is made to love and to be loved."

Such is the marvel of the union of love in marriage according to God. Love will make of two beings a single one.

Adam acclaimed it upon awaking: “This now is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman, because she was taken out of man.” That is why the sacred text adds: “Wherefore a man shall leave father and mother and shall cleave to his wife: and they shall be two in one flesh.”

This virginal page does not yet speak of the mother but only of the spouse. God gives Man a companion — not several but one — and this society is called conjugal society. This society will be composed of two persons, a couple, only two. So true is this that until this first woman became a mother, she had no name of her own. There was only one name for both.

How wonderful is the inviolable oneness of the human couple according to the desire of God!

MAN BORN OF SLIME.

WHAT was God’s first aim in instituting marriage? Was it the mutual union of the couple? Was it procreation?

We can learn much of God’s designs without departing from the story of Genesis. God desiring to multiply humankind by means of generation (the first aim) created a mutual attraction between the sexes, which would lead them on to love (the second aim). That is how the matter stands from a logical point of view. Considered from the psychological point of view, the first aim is the union of the two; the child comes only as an issue and consecration of the union.

This is no time to develop a thesis. Much more valuable is it to draw inspiration for useful reflection upon the plan of God.

Adam was formed from the slime of the earth, Eve from the body of Adam. Might not this great difference in origin explain, in part at least, the essential difference between the masculine temperament and the feminine temperament? Man is coarser grained, more vehement in passion, more readily excited to physical desires. That is understandable because of his role in generation; he is constituted for conquest and, with rare exceptions, more readily advances beyond the suggestions or demands of delicacy and restraining modesty than a woman does. In many ways he evidences that he is more earthy than his wife. This is not a condemnation but simply a statement of a providential reality. Woman, according to Bishop Dupanloup, is more soulful than man. That, too, can be understood in the light of her role in marriage. Might it not also be explained by the fact that, born as she was from a living human being, the beginnings of her material being were nobler than Adam?

In any case, one thing is certain — God wanted Adam and Eve to be different from each other. It is a mistake for man to become effeminate, for woman to play the man. They are not made to resemble each other but to complement each other.

Let man keep the department of masculine forcefulness and let woman keep the department of necessary refinements.

Woman has probably failed at times in fidelity to her essential feminine vocation. Her game of imitating man whether attempted through perversity or thoughtlessness goes contrary to the plan of the Most High. God does well what He does. If He created Eve after Adam, it was not that He might have upon the earth only Adam and Adam.

Man too does not want to see just himself again in woman. Just because he has enough of being himself only, he desires something else. If woman presents nothing but an extension of masculinity,

he has nothing but that to go on. He becomes completely himself only when a woman who is truly a woman comes to join him according to the plan willed by Providence.

Let women take on men's work, if need be, during difficult times which call men to arms; they but do their duty and we extol them for it. Aside from such an emergency, let them keep to their own field, the exercise of womanly functions, and leave to men the functions of man.

SOME FEMININE TRAITS.

THE Bible clearly reveals the role designed for woman by Providence. Formed from a living person rather than from slime, her lead in the home is to be spiritual; drawn from close proximity to man's heart she is to rule by loving devotedness. Created as man's complement, she is not to become his rival but his helpmate.

It is worthy of note also that the first woman was imposed on Adam. The first man did not have a choice among several women. Eve formed by God from Adam's own being was given to Adam by God.

Ever after, aside from the periods in history when woman was nothing more than a slave or when she was given in marriage without her consent, she would be chosen by man in order to enter into marriage. As a consequence, woman has a double characteristic — an innate genius for adornment and, in regard to other women, a jealousy that can be inflamed by a mere nothing.

She has a genius for adornment. She must please. And that is right. No one need reproach her for striving to do so. "The pheasants are preening their feathers," Saint Francis de Sales humorously commented in answer to Saint Jane Frances de Chantal's letter expressing worry over her daughters' newly evidenced concern about their dress. It is excess that is blameworthy.

Charles Diehl, in the first volume of "Figures Byzantines" tells us that political reasons did not always direct the marriages contracted by the emperor of Byzantium. When the Empress Irene wanted to marry off her son Constantine, she sent messengers everywhere to find the most beautiful girl in the empire; she herself set the requirements as to age, height, and personal appearance of the candidates.

A fig for nobility! The basilissa ('future empress') needed only to be beautiful. That alone qualified her to be considered sovereign; the marriage would follow. It was not therefore as wife of the emperor that she received power but rather as a sort of choice by God indicated by her beauty...

How many women at that time must have hoped to become empress!

And how many women since the Byzantine era as well as before have counted on their "beauty" to come into power and acquire a husband. Provided that she stays within her bounds when capitalizing on her real or supposed beauty, woman does not depart from her role.

She does however depart from it when concern for her looks becomes her sole interest or when she gives herself up to jealousy of actual or possible rivals.

Her aim should be to keep within the plan of Providence and never go beyond it.

MARRIAGE AND THE BIBLE. (2)

II. The Law of Procreation.

GOD did not create love and marriage only for the mutual pleasure of husband and wife. The purpose of their union goes beyond union. From the married couple's intimate union a third person will issue, and if the marriage is fruitful a series of thirds, a progeny which will be the glory of the parents.

Increase and Multiply. God could have multiplied the living without using his creatures as instruments. Adam and Eve were directly created. God needed no one. So true is this, that in the creation of the soul the Most High uses no intermediary. He reserves to Himself the power to infuse the soul into the child whose body the parents cooperate in producing.

As far as the body is concerned God permits and even desires that there should be an intermediary cause, and that constitutes a great marvel. God imparts to His creatures a share in His creative power. The parents are united in the physical expression of their conjugal love and from this bodily union, provided nothing bars the way, life will be born. For the soul there is to be no human agent. For the body a human agent shall exist. It is through the instrumentality of the parents that the body of the child will be born. But God reserves to Himself the power to put the soul into that body by a direct act of creation.

That is the basis for the sovereign beauty of fatherhood and motherhood... At the birth of her first born son, Eve, transported with joy, exclaimed, "I have gotten a man through God."

There is a double law in marriage — the law of chastity and the law of fecundity. The law of chastity permits the husband and wife to regulate according to their desire the frequency of intercourse. Should they by mutual consent decide to live for a time as brother and sister, say during Lent or Advent, or at some other times in their life together, for any just and noble reasons, they may do so provided they run no risk of sin.

The principal application of the law of chastity for the married is this: If they decide either by explicit or implicit agreement to perform the marriage act, they may do nothing to prevent conception.

Let them petition God for the desired grace to practice the restraints and continence they recognize as helpful or if it is not advisable for them to abstain from physical union, the grace to do nothing counter to duty.

CONJUGAL DUTY.

THE demands of married life emanate above all from the Natural Law; in other words, right reason left to itself would reveal them to conscience. Even if Christ had never come, if Revelation had never been given, these requirements would be what they are. The Church, keeping to the doctrine of Christ merely upholds them with her supreme authority; she does not institute them. She reaffirms the law, explains its application, clarifies the ideal every time someone attempts to obscure it.

To that end, we have various encyclicals of the popes, such as *Maximum illud* by Leo XIII and *Casti Connubii* by Pius XI and also pastoral letters issued periodically by bishops as the need arises.

One of the most complete of such letters on conjugal duty is the one written by Cardinal Mercier of Belgium. Reminding the people of his diocese of the true doctrine on marriage, he explains the Christian concept of the conjugal life:

“The original and primary reason for the union of man and woman is the foundation of a family, the beginning of children whom they will have the honor and the obligation to rear in the Faith and in Christian principles.

“It appears, therefore, that the first effect of marriage is a duty which the married may not avoid...

“How far from truth are those who present marriage as a union whose sole purpose is physical love.

“The attraction to conjugal intercourse is legitimate, beyond a doubt. But such satisfaction of the sexual appetite is justifiable only in the function for which it was destined and which it was meant to ensure.

“How grave then is the sin of those who circumvent the divine law in this matter. A mortal sin is committed every time that the conception of a child is prevented by a deliberate positive act.”

Deliberately, before, during or after intercourse to take precautions destined to prevent conception constitutes a formal and seriously unlawful act.

The insidious propaganda on birth control that is being spread about through pamphlets, lectures, and advertisements is nothing but an effort to make an attack on life a lawful act. Cardinal Mercier condemns doctors, pharmacists, or mid-wives who betray their social mission.

It is forbidden to attack life, even in the generative act itself, that is to say, at the very point of origin. And those who dare to kill the living one being formed in the womb of its mother, are punished by the Church with censure reserved to the bishop. That means that the priest who absolves them must obtain from the bishop special authorization to do so, although he need not mention their names.

How the thought of all the souls sacrificed through marriage frauds ought to incite me to pray for holiness of family life and general observance of conjugal duty. War is not the scourge which kills the most people. It is lust. Yes — Lust has led to Abortion, and Abortion kills a baby, sadly, so many babies.

MOTHERHOOD.

THE writer who said, “Man conquers and woman gives herself,” was correct. Such indeed is the difference between man and woman in their attitude to life. His is an active heroism; hers a passive heroism. For the grown man, life is but a series of conquests; he goes from one victory to the other, carried along by the zest of it until he fails. Woman makes a gift of herself to life; she spends herself to the point of exhaustion for her husband, for her children, for those who suffer, for the unfortunate. But this gift of hers in its fullest significance is childbirth, a supreme act of passive heroism. Giving birth to a child is not a purely physical achievement. A mind, a soul come to life and uniting with the foetus form, without the mother’s awareness, a man — a miracle indeed.

What is the most wonderful is the blossoming and growth of maternal love in the woman from the very moment of her child’s conception, through its birth, and throughout its whole life, but particularly during its baby days.

In a certain sense, every woman from her earliest years has the makings of a mother in her. As a little girl she plays with her doll, and the game holds her interest only because her imagination transforms the rag doll or china doll she clasps in her already expert arms into a living child. So true

is this, that even virginal souls who consecrate themselves to the service of the neighbor may be called mother; that they really are for their poor, their orphans, their sick...

But it is quite evident that at the time of actual maternity, of physical maternity, a special creation is effected in the woman. At the same time that milk mounts to her breast, maternal love takes possession of her soul, a love of a very special quality which does not precede but which follows childbirth. Before the child appears, there can be expectation, yearning, vague tenderness like the dawn preceding day; it is not yet maternal love in the strongest and strictest sense of the word.

The child is born. The woman, even though she had been extremely lazy, manifests an astonishing energy for all that concerns her baby. Though she had been previously most shiftless now she becomes ingenious, attentive, watchful and almost anxious. No one need tell her that her tiny babe can do nothing for itself and that it is exposed to danger of death at almost every instant. She anticipates its needs, its desires and a frown appears at the least cloud that passes over the cradle. No trouble daunts her. As a young girl and young woman, she grumbled over sacrifice and became irritable; now she is eager in sacrifice — hours of watching, getting up at night; if not able to nurse the child, she makes minute preparation of formulas, and even later, pays careful attention to the kinds of food the baby may have. It all seems to come to her naturally; it seems to be second-nature. But even if she has acquired her knowledge through training and study in special courses which she may have taken with no particular relish, now she carries it out with special zest and warmth of feeling.

If her baby is well formed, beautiful, healthy and lively, she rejoices. But if, unfortunately, it is deformed, weak, listless, her love increases. It is as if she wishes to shower him with love to make up to the little one for all he lacks as if by clasping it more tenderly to herself she can supplement its life.

Should her child later become a prodigal, she will have for him an astonishing partiality; if she believes him to be a hero, it is her prejudice in his favor! Marvelous contradiction in which maternal love reveals itself!

How eagerly she desires the father's love for the child. Then again she is afraid that the father will not be sufficiently firm and will give in to him too easily. Now the warmest caresses, now the height of disinterestedness born of maternal love!

IS BIRTH CONTROL PERMISSIBLE?

TO LIMIT procreation by the practice of contraceptive devices without foregoing sexual union is forbidden. No one has the right to suppress life. To do away with a living adult is homicide; to do away with the living child in the course of its development within the womb of its mother is the crime of abortion; to destroy the seed of life, in the very generative act itself so as to prevent possible conception is Onanism, so called after Onan in the Old Testament who indulged in this practice.

No one has the right to place any act, which by its nature is productive of life, and on his own authority, frustrate the effects of that act which is the generation of a life. Nature must be allowed to take its course. However, if for some reason decreed by Providence, conception does not take place, that is God's act. The individual has not on his own decision killed or sought to kill human life or sought to prevent the intended human life.

It has already been said that to limit procreation by abstaining from intercourse is within the right of the husband and wife.

There is however, another method of birth control which has been much discussed and about which it is essential to have clear ideas. May the married couple profit by the wife's cycles of infertility, as suggested by the Rhythm theory, limiting their sexual union to such periods as seem less likely to result in conception? The answer to that question ought to be qualified. [In our discussion, we need to be aware that modern medicine has made great advances in the knowledge and prediction of the wife's ovulation cycle and 'Rhythm' now includes 'Ovulation' and 'Billings' methods of fertility prediction.]

To adopt this practice temporarily in order to space births somewhat without having to deprive themselves of each other is certainly different from making the practice habitual in order definitely to avoid having any children or to avoid it at least for a long time.

Certainly graver reasons are needed to justify the second instance than to justify the first. Are the reasons for it purely selfish? Then the married partners are at fault. They do not by their conduct violate the law of chastity in marriage, that is true, but they do violate the law of charity, or to put it more graphically, the law of fruitfulness.

The plan of God for married persons in this matter of fecundity is not that they have the largest number of children possible. Rather it is that they should have the largest number that they are capable of rearing well, considering the position in which Providence has placed them or in other words taking into account the health, the economic status of the family, and other such considerations. It is a problem of honesty.

It is up to each individual to face himself squarely on this problem, if it is his, and examine himself sincerely on the complete honesty of his manner of acting. Then such a one will be ready to meditate often upon the reasons that argue for peopling the cradles.

WHY HAVE A LARGE FAMILY?

WE HAVE seen that the practice of Rhythm, above all if it is only temporary, is legitimate and reasonable. But, even in that case, particularly when it concerns those just starting out on their marital life, it is advisable to call attention to some vital considerations to be taken into account:

The harm it can do by separating the idea of sexual pleasure from the idea of fatherhood and motherhood.

The harm it can do by overemphasizing the carnal side of life together at the expense of the tender and spiritual aspect.

The harm it can do by causing inordinate abandonment to the senses during the infertile periods.

Rather than seeking out the means — even legitimate means — of limiting the offspring, what is really important for the married couple is to discover the reasons for having many children.

There are reasons of charity:

1. Toward children who depend upon the parents to be called or not called to life — to eternity.
2. Toward Christian society to which they should seek to give as many baptized souls as possible and, if God permits, priests and religious for a world that needs them so much.

3. Toward their country for whom they may rear citizens who will bring her life and prosperity.

How beautiful are such reasons!

Consider these young chosen ones in perspective. It depends on me — on us — with just a little generosity on our part, to dare to bring them forth from nothingness, to call them into being, to life.

That will mean greater glory for God; it will mean for them an eternity of happiness. It is up to me — to us — to open for them the book of life, the Book of Life; for a life in its fuller sense is not merely a period of time, it is part of a life which will never end. In bringing forth children, parents are fashioning citizens of eternity.

It is not enough to consider the Church triumphant and how to help the greatest possible number to enter into it; we can and we ought to consider the Church militant. Are the number of baptized souls bent on living their baptism sufficient in number? Where can they better increase, develop and aid in the Christian renewal, that is, the baptismal renewal of the world than in Christian families? Are there enough priests?... War has mowed down a great number of them. Even before the Great War of 1914, let alone that of 1939-1945, there were not enough for the work to be done. Now, the need is tragic. Bishops can only ordain... The priesthood depends mainly on marital holiness. If parents do their duty, if they are generous, there will be priests; otherwise, the Church will weaken.

As for our country [whatever the country], its beauty is proportionate to its men, to its men of valor. The recent wars showed the tragedy of a lack of manpower. These are of course temporal reasons, but spiritual interests are closely linked with them.

Reflect on all this... Let life live!

THE BELL OF LIFE.

IN 1935, there was a project on foot to install a bell of life and a dial of death in the heart of the city of Berlin. The plan may have fallen through. A large bell was to boom out every five minutes; in the interval a smaller bell was to ring nine times announcing to the neighborhood that nine children were being born in Germany during that time. Then an hour glass was to indicate to the passersby that in the space of five minutes, seven Germans had gone to their graves.

Whether realized or not, the project was worthwhile. To announce the increase of life is helpful; to call to mind the work of death more helpful still, but not the least important is to point out the triumph of life over death.

Today's meditation is to dwell on this last thought. It is not so important now to contemplate the end of life and the responsibility to be faced at that dread moment as to welcome the new cradles of life and to determine whether I am increasing for my country, as I should, the chiming of the life-bell.

In November 1939, a leader of a heavy artillery division at the Maginot line wrote in a letter: "I have eighteen men in my sector. They are between thirty and thirty-five years old; all except a few are married; all of them together have only eight children!"

If, as good Political Economy points out the average number of children per family for a country which does not want to die out is three — two to replace the father and mother and a third destined to fill the void caused by infant mortality — then those eighteen men should have had at least fifty-four children among them. They had eight. The deficit then: Forty-six.

There is of course no moral law that requires the married to have three children. The example given here is simply a social or national aspect of the problem. It has already been pointed out that the moral law is determined not by the country to which one belongs — although there might be a duty to give it a thought — but by the law of chastity in marriage on the one hand and the law of fecundity on the other.

It might be well here to come back to these points. The law of fecundity expects the parents to have as many children as they are capable of rearing in a human and Christian manner. As for birth control, the law of chastity sets the rule: nothing may be done artificially to frustrate conception.

But to return to the social viewpoint — my country's future, society's need: Of what good is it to cry out 'Long live my country!' if my only contribution is to her death?

More cradles than tombs! That should be our motto. How great is the disaster when the contrary is true! Does not such an argument, which possibly has no force with weaklings or those too wrapped up in themselves, bear weight with me? It is not the most decisive argument to encourage large families, but it is not a negligible argument.

Patriotic duty does not belong to morality in war time only. It exists and binds conscience in peace as well. In another way perhaps but just as imperatively.

Do I love my country? Do I love her enough to be willing to give her children? Certainly not primarily for the time of war, but for peace-time equally. The more valiant hearts and arms there are, the more prosperous is the country. The true wealth of a people is their wealth in men.

THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF HAVING CHILDREN?

WE HAVE seen clearly that it is a "serious matter" to prevent conception by any voluntary positive act and if full knowledge and complete consent of the will are present, it constitutes a mortal sin. If the marital act is performed, then God may not in any way — by the opposition of the parents — be hindered from creating a soul.

'But we cannot, considering our burdens, increase the number of our children!'

That may be, responds the Moral Law; such a case is far from being imaginary. But you do not enter upon marriage only for enjoyment. In the plan of Divine Providence, pleasure is the accomplishment or the result of duty fulfilled. To separate the pleasure from the duty, to seek the first while evading the second is to go counter to the divine plan. Sexual pleasure presupposes the normal exercise of the generative function, the acceptance of the resultant burdens for which it is, as Cardinal Mercier expresses it, "the providential payment."

'But when you consider the intimacy of life together, how can we refrain for any length of time at all without giving ourselves to each other?'

There is every reason to believe that, without prayer and recourse to the sacraments, you are right. But what is your supernatural program? What are you doing to rise above the senses, to moderate the flesh?

'Can't we choose those times when fertility is least probable?'

Yes, if you have a sufficient reason, as you seem to have.

And the necessity of having to practice prudent and courageous continence several days each month will in itself force you to a certain and meritorious generosity.

‘Even that is not possible for us; for then we would have to renounce marital intimacies.’

Of course. But nowhere has it been said that marriage is a state where one can allow himself every liberty suggested by his caprice without exercising any judgment.

That is said nowhere; at least, not in any sane and honest books on morality. Married persons are too quick to think that, because they have not chosen “the state of perfection” in absolute virginity, the great virtues are not for them.

Even in granting themselves what they may legitimately permit themselves, the husband and wife have a large field for detachment. They ought to be willing to profit by the opportunity and not reject it on the plea of moral or physiological impossibility when it is really because of their lack of stamina, of Christian spirit, and the will to self-control.

How will such married persons, anemic in their spiritual life and accustomed to denying themselves nothing, even when the cost is not too great, deny themselves when a serious law binds them?

One must learn to will in order to know how to will. And if one falls, he must not excuse but accuse himself.

You are the Judge of my past, O my God. I offer You all its efforts and its weaknesses. Give me the grace to be generous in the future.

THE ONLY CHILD.

THERE is, as we have seen, a double duty involved in the marital bond:

The duty of chastity: In no way to attack the law of life.

The duty of charity or fruitfulness: To do one’s best for the production of life.

It is impossible — and that is self-evident — to set a definite figure as the gauge of duty in procreation. A very competent authority on this subject, Father P. Boisgelat, S. J., has this to say:

“Who keeps below his minimum possibilities fails in the duty of his state of life and sins through selfishness. Who strives for his possibilities and realizes them does his duty. Who exceeds the maximum of his possibilities sins by imprudence and intemperance.”

As for this level of possibility about which he speaks, it must be determined by each one’s conscience without selfishness and without imprudence.

“One must on his part confide in God, abandoning to Divine Providence the possibility of unforeseen misfortunes, such as the unexpected and early death of the father, a possible lower economic status in the future, war...”

“Duty obliges us to foresee only what is foreseeable and likely; all the rest must be confided to God.”

There are couples who eagerly desire one child but not several children. They want the one either to have a tangible proof that they have made a fruitful marriage or to create a precious and living bond between them. They desire only the one because they do not want to be encumbered; they do not

want to limit the regular tenor of their lives, the quality and variety of their wardrobe, and they are afraid to run the risk to their health that every new birth might bring; they dread the crying and the inconvenience caused by very little children. These reasons and others just as selfish are worth nothing. Serious reasons are necessary to dispense from serious duty.

The idea of limiting the family in order to give to the one (or to the very small number) resources which will eliminate the necessity of working or assure the whole benefit of the entire fortune is not in itself selfish on the part of the parents. It is extremely harmful however. We are not born to avoid work here below. Each one is obliged to contribute his maximum effort to the welfare of society. We are not here to reign, but to wrestle.

Parents do not manifest much esteem for the fruit of their blood if they do not deem it capable of gaining, by its own power, a place in life whenever it so desires.

Then, too, is there not always the danger that the only child will receive too soft a training, that he will be spoiled and be of an inferior character?

Should this only child die young, what anguish for the father and mother! They themselves become the very first victims of their damnable birth control.

CHRIST AND MARRIAGE.

OUR LORD did not come to destroy but to fulfill the law.

Marriage was to remain exactly what it was in the Natural Law:

the exchange of two wills for the purpose of procreation. Our Savior who knew very well the difficulties of the marital state made a sacrament of this mutual exchange of wills, a rite that imparts grace. Each of the two in becoming united to the other will enrich that other one with an increase of sanctifying grace. Both should be in the state of grace before the marriage takes place since it is a sacrament of the living, which means that its purpose is to intensify the divine life already existing in the soul. By their gift of themselves to each other, they also obtain for each other a gift of new growth in the divine.

Because marriage is fundamentally a contract — a double yes giving to each of the two complete right to the other — it has this special feature that there is no other minister than the two concerned. Sometimes people say, “That’s Father So and So; he married us.” The expression is incorrect. It is not the priest who marries the bride and groom; they marry themselves. They themselves are the ministers of the sacrament which they receive at the same time. The priest is there only in the capacity of a witness representing the Church; as the witness required for the validity of the marriage; but a witness only.

What eminent dignity therefore has the sacrament of Matrimony! What eminent dignity have the bride and groom! They are for each other transmitters of the divine.

The bonds which they contract, bear upon two points: the oneness of the couple, the indissolubility of their bonds. Our Lord, who made of marriage a grace-giving rite, also stressed the double obligation of unity and indissolubility.

Oneness: They form a single unit. They shall be two in one flesh, says Genesis. But due to human grossness, forms of polygamy were introduced. Our Savior forbade them, and the Church has always taken care to require the observance of the law. Love itself demands it. Marriage is such an

intimate reality. To live it with several individuals at the same time is condemned by natural feeling itself. Divine law merely reaffirms this basic requirement. Furthermore, family stability, as well as the happiness of the children, militate equally in favor of oneness.

Indissolubility: Marriage creates a oneness forever; a oneness that can be dissolved only by the death of either partner. The encyclical of Pius XI, “Casti-Connubii” reminds the world of this:

“For each individual marriage, inasmuch as it is a conjugal union of a particular man and woman, arises only from the free consent of each of the spouses; and this free act of the will, by which each party hands over and accepts those rights proper to the state of marriage is so necessary to constitute true marriage that it cannot be supplied by any human power.

“This freedom, however, regards only the point whether the contracting parties really wish to enter upon matrimony or to marry this particular person; but the nature of matrimony is entirely independent of the free will of man, so that if one has once contracted matrimony he is thereby subject to its Divinely made laws and its essential properties.”

MARRIAGE AND BAPTISM.

CHRIST came to restore to us the divine life lost by original sin. He instituted baptism as the practical means of entering upon the supernatural. The baptized person is not only a soul and a body, but a soul in which God lives.

According to one of the Fathers of the Church, baptism is a marriage between God and the soul; he goes so far as to call the soul *Spirita Sancta* the feminine form for the Holy Spirit (*Spiritus Sanctus*). Without this marriage of God and the soul, the individual can have no spiritual fecundity. It is impossible: The most noble human act performed by one in mortal sin has no value at all for heaven.

What then is the marriage of two beings of flesh and bone?

It is the image on an earthly plane of a union which is more beautiful although invisible — the union of God and the soul.

Baptism, marriage — two sacraments of union — and the second will always be but a symbol of the first. Union of God with the soul, union of husband and wife. Two sacraments of union; two sacraments of fecundity. Without God, the soul can do nothing fruitful for heaven; without each other, husband and wife cannot beget children. And just as Saint Paul could call all sin adultery since it is deliberate divorce from God, so every break in the marriage bond is blameworthy and true adultery.

Both baptism and marriage then are sacraments of inviolable union. A rupture of the union whether a divorce from God or a divorce from one’s partner in marriage can in either case be called adultery.

What better guarantee have the wedded couple of their reciprocal fidelity than their common life in the state of grace! Each of the two refusing to be divorced from God is thus more sure of the other. United as they are by the same promise, by conjugal embraces, they are likewise united with each other by the same Holy Spirit who forms the Bond between them. Any husband or wife who denies this is already committing an offence against the integrity of the gift of self. Each of the two must live the truth of Tertullian’s definition of a soul in grace. “What is a Christian?” he asked. “A Christian is a soul in a body and God in that soul.” To give to one’s partner in marriage only the first two elements and refuse the third is not to give all, not to give the best. Truly it is a plunder, a

plunder which injures husband and wife. Is it possible not to realize this? It remains profoundly true just the same: Indeed, it is a double betrayal. For who can say that one who has been coward enough to betray God will not be just as likely to betray the partner of his life?

So true is this, that only fidelity to God can give completeness to marriage.

RESPECT IN LOVE.

COMPLETE fidelity in marriage is essential. It is however only a minimum. To treat each other as living tabernacles of God — that is what marriage between two baptized persons demands.

Know you that the sacrament of Christian initiation transforms a person into a living temple of the Most High?

You know.

Well then, behind this more or less attractive human silhouette, which is the person of the marriage partner, body and soul, there is God dwelling within and living His Divine life in the depths of the soul. Consequently, when poor health or advancing age cause husband or wife to grow less attractive exteriorly, that is not a reason for love to wane.

How many know that when husband and wife in the state of grace embrace each other by conjugal privilege, they clasp the Holy Trinity, who unites them even more closely than their human embrace? Far from coming between them, what supernatural intimacy and what magnificent dignity does it give to their union! How it elevates, and idealizes what in itself is good though still carnal and therefore capable of easily becoming earthy and, for some, difficult to consider as something noble.

It is rare to find Christians who truly have faith, at least faith in the fundamental mystery of the life of the baptized. Father Charles de Foucauld [beatified in 2005] wrote to his married sister who was the mother of a family:

“God is in us, in the depths of our soul... always, always, always there, listening to us and asking us to chat a bit with Him. And that is, as much as my weakness will permit, my very life, my darling. Try, that more and more it may become yours; this will not isolate you, nor draw you away from your other occupations. It only requires a minute; then, instead of being alone, there will be two of you to fulfill your tasks. From time to time lower your eyes toward your heart, recollect yourself for a mere quarter of a minute and say:

“You are there, my God. I love You.” It will take you no more time than that and all that you do will be much better done having such a help. And what help it is! Little by little, you will acquire the habit and you will finally be always aware of this sweet companion within yourself, this God of our hearts... Let us pray for each other that we may both keep this dear Guest of our souls loving company.”

If husband and wife were equally convinced of the living splendor their souls actually present, how the marital act, so holy to begin with, would become for them an act of divine faith, an act penetrated by the highest supernatural spirit.

I want to meditate often on my baptism, and the mystery of the divine life in me. I want to become accustomed to treat myself as a living tabernacle of my Lord, to regard the companion of my life as the thrice holy shrine of the Divinity, for I know this to be a reality.

The just live by faith. I want to live by faith.

MARRIAGE AND THE MYSTICAL BODY.

CHRIST came to restore the divine life lost to us by sin. But how? He did not save us only by some act external to Himself as one might lay down a sum of money to ransom a slave but by incorporating us in Himself, by making all of us with Him a single organism. "I am the Vine, you are the branches." Christ is the Head, we the members and together we are the whole body, Christ. The aggregate of all the members, all the branches united constitutes the Church joined by an unbreakable bond to Christ, its Leader and Head.

And Christian marriage will be... and will only be... but the symbol of this union of Christ with His Church, of the Church with its Head. Saint Paul at the end of his Epistle to the Christians at Ephesus (5:21-33) gives no other rule of love and of security in their union to the married than the counsel to copy this union in their life. He says to wives. "Let women be subject to their husbands as to the Lord: because the husband is the head of his wife as Christ is the head of the Church, being Himself Savior of the body. But just as the Church is subject to Christ, so also let wives be to their husbands in all things."

Then addressing himself to husbands, he continues:

"Husbands love your wives, just as Christ also loved the Church and delivered Himself up for her." This is the way husbands ought to love their wives and recalling the words of Genesis. "They shall be two in one flesh," Saint Paul concludes, "This is a great mystery... I mean in reference to Christ and to the Church."

Is it possible to imagine a divorce between Christ and the Church, between the Church and Christ? By the same token, it should be impossible to conceive of a divorce between a man and woman in Christian marriage, the man being but a double, an image of Christ; the woman a double, an image of the Church.

This is but a negative aspect... not to be disunited. The union of Christ with the Church which baptism symbolizes invites the married to have for each other the most profound and entire consecration to each other. It is this entire consecration to each other, which Saint Paul demands.

It is not without reason that the liturgy of the nuptial mass contains this particular epistle of Saint Paul. Unfortunately how few understand something of the significance of these texts!

How much more fitting would it be, at the time of the marriage, to profit by the marriage discourse to explain to those concerned the sublime meaning of the ceremony and the obligations which will ensue instead of handing out just so much twaddle and bestowing so many compliments!

The whole difficulty is that it would necessitate touching upon the profound Gospel spirit and, for the majority of persons, the Gospel is a dead letter. As a consequence, everyone keeps to the low level of hackneyed themes understandable to all.

'I shall come back often to this Epistle of my nuptial Mass; it will help me to deepen my Christianity.'

MUTUAL DEVOTEDNESS.

THE emphasis upon the duty of reciprocal devotedness of husband and wife is evident in the previous quotation from Saint Paul. So that the Church may remain intact, beautiful, and

immaculate, Christ is lavish in His care of her. In return, the Church leaves nothing undone to bring glory to her Divine Spouse.

That is how husbands and wives should treat each other. The husband must be another Christ, a faithful copy of Christ. He ought to neglect nothing for the honor and the welfare of his wife; he should even be ready, if the need arose, to shed his blood for her. She, on her part, ought to do everything to revere her husband. It must be a mutual rivalry of love.

Just as there exists between Christ and the Church, in perfect harmony with their mutual devotedness, a bond of authority on the one side and of submission on the other, so too in the home, the husband is entrusted with the lead in their advance together and the wife joins her efforts to his in sentiments of loving submission.

The wife's duty of subordination to her husband does not arise from woman's incapacity but from the different functions each of the two are to exercise. When each fulfills well the proper function, the unity of the home is assured. The wife is not a slave; she is a companion. On essential points, there is no subordination but necessary equality.

The man has no right to come to marriage sullied and yet demand that his wife be still a virgin. The man does not have permission to betray the home, and the wife the obligation to remain faithful. And when it is a question of the marriage right, the duty is conjugal, equal for each: When the husband asks the wife to give herself to him, she must grant the request. But there is a reciprocal duty. When she makes the same request of him, he too must grant it.

The duty of subordination holds only where the direction of the home is concerned. It does not give the husband the right to impose any of his whims upon his wife. In fact, should he go so far as to make demands contrary to the law of God, she has the duty to resist him with all gentleness but also with the necessary firmness. Rightly understood, then, the wife's submission to her husband is not at all demeaning. Moreover, to obey is never to descend but to ascend.

Let husband and wife strive not so much to equal each other as to be worthy of each other. Let the husband put into the exercise of his authority the reserve and prudence which win confidence and let the wife strive to be an accomplished woman not masculine but feminine.

The interesting character of the home is not a man, a woman, but the couple; not an individual, but the family, the harmonious development of the family cell; not duality as such but the advance in common of the two.

WOMAN'S SUPERIORITY.

IN HIS book "Il Sangue di Cristo," (The Blood of Christ) Iginio Giordani pronounces this judgment:

"Even when he is good, man always reminds one a little of a heron; he stands on one foot and assumes poses. He turns to the right, then to the left, and what concern he shows for his appearance!

"The Christian woman fulfills the more obscure domestic tasks, services humble and hidden. The woman is to be like Mary. She will become familiar with the tasks that require abnegation. Is it not perhaps easier to ascend the pulpit than to watch at the bedside of the dying? There are plenty of such examples. Saint Augustine wrote stacks of books but who made a confessor of the faith out of this professor? His mother — with her tears.

“More women than men enter religion; yet they do not have the satisfaction of the priesthood. It is perhaps because of these interceding and retiring women that all does not go up in the smoke of vanity’s fireworks.”

Men might perhaps retort that on the score of vanity, women do not yield to them a point. If they, the men, know how to pose to advantage, and women, just to win admiration, also do their share of strutting, and with an earnestness worthy of a better cause. Would they be such slaves to fashion if they did not have — and how much more than men — the mania for excelling their rivals and gaining notice?

Certainly, in self sacrifice and above all in the daily humble hidden devotedness which the tasks of the home require, woman is in the lead. That does not mean that man, in his profession, does not know how to sacrifice himself for the one he loves. Would he spend himself as he does if he did not know that a smile would reward him in the evening and a gentle voice would sing his praises? Nevertheless, in general, the opinion of Giordani can be accepted as well as the proofs he gives for it.

We need not consider religious life now. It has no point here. All we need do is look to the Christian home to find without difficulty numerous and sometimes touching examples of devotedness which nothing can exhaust. Here is a wife; she has a husband who gets beside himself with rage; he has real fits of temper, the blood rushes to his head and he is practically on the verge of a stroke. Will the woman let him go to his fate and punish him for his violence by depriving him at least for a time of her attentions? Not at all!

Wasn’t it Shakespeare who gave us this delightful scene: A sheriff is enraged against his wife. She leaves the room. Perhaps she has gone off to pout because she is away for a while. But no! Here she comes, her arms loaded down, and sets about preparing mustard packs for her husband’s feet and cold packs for his head to avert the ill effects of his moments of fury.

It might be just an episode in a play but it is none the less symbolic.

That is woman for you!

THE BOSS IN THE HOUSE.

AFTER a meditation on his duty of ruling his future home, Maurice Retour, an industrialist and one of the youngest captains of World War I of which he was a victim, wrote the following ideas to his fiancée: “In all the families I have visited, the husbands want to appear to rule their wives while the wives quietly claim that they rule their husbands. I eagerly desire to have influence on your soul to help you ascend; but I desire just as eagerly to have you exercise a great influence on mine. Let us leave to others such petty behavior and thank God in all humility that He has enlightened us.”

In another letter he came back to the same idea “I wish to be master before the law, I even want to be responsible to God for the morality of our home, but for all the details of our life there is no master. I have never had greater disdain for anyone than I have for a married man who presumes to dominate his wife. I have seen some husbands grow actually stubborn over some detail so that they do not have the appearance before others of giving in to their wives. I think such husbands are idiots.” Then as a reason for his opinion he adds, “Two persons living together necessarily have an influence upon each other, but I promise you never to try by any subtlety to hold you under my dominion. We shall live side by side without a thought for such notions.

“I want to believe that we can belong to each other in order to enjoy life but with a love that will bring us ever close to God... God must always be foremost and He must be our goal even in our love, now and always.”

All husbands are not of that caliber. In a novel by a German author, a certain baron gives his idea on how women should be treated.

“They must be made to feel their inferiority otherwise they will be spoiled.

“If you get married, do as I do. Never tell her beforehand about a trip or a horseback ride. Just lead in your horse. ‘Where are you going, my dear?’ she will ask the first or second time. Give no answer, but continue putting on your gloves. ‘Are you going to let me alone like this?’ she will add stroking your cheeks. You seize your riding whip quickly and say, ‘Yes, I have to go to town. I have this and that to do. Goodbye. And if I’m not back at nine o’clock for supper, don’t wait for me.’ She trembles, but you don’t pay any attention. She runs after you, but you signal with your whip for her to go back. She runs to the window, leans out and waves her handkerchief crying ‘Adrien!’ But let her white banner wave and don’t bother. Dig in your spurs and get going! I swear that that’s the way to keep women respectful. By the third time, my wife asked no more questions and God be praised, the wailing has come to an end.”

A mere comparison of these two different attitudes makes the right one stand out clearly. There are some husbands who are blackguards; others who are gentlemen.

‘My choice is made.’

MARRIAGE AND THE EUCHARIST. (1) The Sacraments of Love. The Need of Presence.

A YOUNG lady before her marriage wrote to her future husband asking him to go to Holy Communion with her as often as possible; “The Eucharist is the sacrament of those who are engaged to be married because it is the Sacrament of Love.” So impressed was the young man by her thought and so much good did he derive from it, that he engraved the sentence on her tombstone when she was taken from him by an early death.

Marriage and the Eucharist... how true that they are both sacraments of love.

What does love require?

Love expresses itself by these three needs: the need of the presence of the beloved, the need of union, the need of exchange of sacrifices. Each of the two sacraments satisfies this triple need.

Need of presence. In the Eucharist: “This is My Body.” God present in us in His divine nature by sanctifying grace received at baptism found the means to unite to Himself a human nature: “The Word was made flesh.” He was certain that under that new form He would find a way to make Himself present to humanity. Therefore, the Eucharist.

In marriage: Needless to mention the yearning the couple have to be together. If they talk, it will only be to tell each other how glad they are to be near each other. They may say nothing, but then in the deep silence which envelops them, their souls will be knit together; they will commune and exchange the best of themselves. Silence between lovers is often more eloquent than words; the following advice of a Chinese sage to a young girl considering a proposal of marriage evidenced judgment and experience:

“If he tells you, “I love you more than all the world,” turn away your head and nonchalantly fuss with your hair. If he tells you, “I love you more than the golden rod in the temple,” adjust the folds of your dress and reproach him laughingly as if amused at his impiety.

“If he passes beneath your window on a white horse to say goodbye because he prefers to die by a thrust of the sword than to despair, give him a flower and wish him a happy trip.

“But if he remains beside you, numb as a slave before a king and clumsy to the point of spilling tea on your blue tablecloth, then smile at him tenderly as you would for the one whom you wish to accept for always.”

Even though at the beginning of marriage, being together is unalloyed joy and there is no need to urge cohabitation upon the newlyweds, it can happen that in the long run, unpleasantnesses arise; the charm of being together wanes perhaps because faults show up more readily than in the past or because the couple’s concept of marriage was overly romantic, not preparing them for the possible flaws in each other or simply because a man will never be anything else but a man and a woman never anything else but a woman, that is, two limited beings who can not avoid discovering their limitations sooner or later.

No one is obliged to marry. But once married, cohabitation is a duty. Canon Law states: “The spouses must observe the community of the conjugal life.” Saint Alphonsus says even more specifically, “The married are bound to cohabitation in one house to the sharing of bed and board.” Separation regarding the last two points can for just reasons, be permitted in certain cases. Grave reasons are necessary to dispense husbands and wives from living under the same roof; there is always the danger of scandal to be feared and, under the stress of temptations which may arise, also the danger of transforming simple separation of bodies into real divorce.

MARRIAGE AND THE EUCHARIST. (2) The Need of Union.

LOVE, which thrives on the mutual presence of the two who cherish each other and yearn for each other, also seeks physical expression.

It is true for marriage; it is true for the Eucharist.

That physical expression is a need of love, both experience and the most elementary psychology more than amply prove. Doesn’t a mother often say to her baby whom she is smothering with kisses, “I could just eat you up,” as if she vainly dreamed of being able to reincorporate it?

What is impossible to the mother is possible to Our Lord. He wanted to give Himself to us as food not so much that we might incorporate Him in ourselves as that He might incorporate us in Himself. In the case of ordinary food, it is the one who eats who assimilates. In the Eucharist, it is the Living Bread which assimilates us in Itself: “Take and eat, this is My Body; take and drink, this is My Blood. If you do not eat the Flesh of the Son of Man, you shall not have life in you. He who eats My Flesh and drinks My Blood shall have life everlasting.”

The Eucharist requires that we take it and consume it. The Host is not made for the eyes, to be seen, but to be eaten. It is not enough to look and to adore; we must receive and assimilate: “Take and eat.” The Real Presence is already a great gift and to be present at Benediction of the Most Blessed Sacrament a precious exercise which the Church praises. But that is not the whole significance of the Eucharist. The Eucharist demands communion, the common union... and what a closely bound community... of two beings who love each other, Christ and the Christian.

Because love is the ideal basis for the sacrament of matrimony, marriage in its turn dreams of physical expression.

Since it is concerned with uniting not angelic but human natures, that is, spirits within bodies, marriage, while it involves a union of souls, also normally involves a union of bodies, which should facilitate the union of souls. It is the entire being of the one which seeks to become united with the entire being of the other.

It can then readily be understood how in view of the particular intimacy sought through bodily union, delicacy claims privacy. It is a good act without question and willed by God who by His nature can permit not even the shadow of sin. The Church, in the course of her history, condemned those overly severe moralists who wanted to oblige the married to go to confession before receiving Holy Communion if they had previously had intercourse.

There is no question about the couple's right to all those marks of affection and tenderness which normally accompany the generative act. Still, between Christian husbands and wives, a wise modesty, not in the least fearful, but decently reserved, will be the rule.

The strict right by which sin is measured is one thing; quite different is the domain of perfection or even of imperfection which extends far beyond that and which is properly the course of Christian refinement.

STRANGE PROFANATION.

MARRIAGE as a sacrament which should be based on love, looks to the conjugal act as an expression of love. And since this embrace is in the nature of the closest of intimacies, everyone understands that it demands unity of the couple. We have spoken of that before. But it is essential to be convinced of it on account of the objections that come up frequently in conversations and the arguments advanced by certain modern authors like Blum, or Montherlant or Lawrence. This last mentioned writer gives us a scene like the following:

Jack who is married to Monica by whom he has several children makes advances to Mary:

"Oh, Jack! You are married to Monica."

"Am I? But she doesn't belong entirely to me; she has her babies now. I shall love her again when she is free. Everything in season, even women. Now I love you after going for a long time without ever thinking of you. A man is not made for a single affair."

"O God," she cried. "You must be crazy. You still love Monica."

"I shall love Monica again later. Now I love you. I don't change, but sometimes it is the one, sometimes it is the other. Why not?"

Yes, Why not? Simply because the rule as regards marriage is not the mere caprice of man and the satisfaction of his sensual desires; because woman has a right to respect and to the pledge that has been given her; because marriage is made not for the individual but for the family, the social unit, and to carry on in such a fashion is the break down of the family.

But Jack — or rather Lawrence — hears nothing of all that.

"Mary, all alone, was incomplete. All women are but parts of a complete thing when they are left to themselves... They are but fragments... All women are but fragments."

Where does such a theory originate if not in the unbounded sensuality of man? But Jack listens to nothing. What do judgments other than his own mean to him? As he said, "He hated the thought of being closed up with one woman and some youngsters in one house. No, several women, several houses, groups of youngsters; a camp not a home! Some women, not one woman. Let the world's conventions be ignored. He was not one of those men for whom one woman was enough."

Why doesn't the logic of sensuality accord woman what man so brutally claims for himself? Are there two Moral Laws?

Here is another character, Helen. She is a doctor's wife and his most devoted assistant. But she divorces him for a snob whose life is all race horses and receptions. There she is, soaked in worldliness. She gets another divorce to marry a young poet, the latest rage, and transforms herself into an intellectual... Marvelous richness of the feminine soul! Says your sophisticate, she is like a fountain of glistening water which catches its coloring, green, red, or blue according to the men she chooses in turn!

Are we dreaming? That's the kind of thing we are likely to hear in certain gatherings and cocktail parties.

What a profanation of love!

Complete oblivion of the significance of the conjugal act! It is not only two distinct physical acts, but, through the medium of the body, a most ineffable exchange between two souls.

MARRIAGE AND THE EUCHARIST. (3) The Need of Sacrifice.

MARRIAGE as a sacrament that should be based on love in the beginning and that must foster love in those who receive it together, expects the mutual presence of a respectful and devoted cohabitation. From the very nature of marriage there devolves the duty of union and of procreation.

Marriage requires still more... mutual sacrifice. And here again its similarity to the Eucharist is remarkable.

Our Lord instituted the Eucharist not only to give us His Presence, not only to provide us with the benefits of Holy Communion. Rich though these benefits be, they do not constitute the culminating benefit. What is the great wealth of the Eucharist?

On Calvary, Our Lord offered Himself all alone to His Father. But by His sacrifice, He merited for us the grace to be grafted on Him. Stretched upon the bloody Arbor of Calvary, Christ's Hands and Feet and Side were cruelly notched; through the benefits of these divine openings we have gained the privilege, we wild offshoots since the time of Adam, branches deprived of divine life, to be set, to be grafted to the single Vine, the only Possessor of sanctifying sap.

Made other Christs that day, all Christians... Christiani... received the power, each time that the Lord Christ Jesus would repeat His sacrificial oblation of Calvary through the hands of His priest for the glory of the Father and the salvation of the world, to offer it with Him. This repetition of that offering is the Mass. Jesus, the divine Mediator, assumes again His attitude of Mediator; held between heaven and earth by the hands of the priest, He reiterates the dispositions of the complete immolation of Calvary.

On Golgotha, He was alone to carry through the sacrifice, the bloody sacrifice. Having been made that day by Him into Christ, we, since we are inseparable from Him except by sin, have the mission,

whenever Christ renews His oblation, to offer it and to offer ourselves to Him. Effective participation in Mass is to be united with the Divine Head and all members of the Mystical Body in the intimacy of the same oblation renewed.

Jesus brings to us the benefits of His very own sacrifice; we bring to Him the offering of our own sacrifice. It is this part of the offering that the martyr's relic in the altar stone and the drop of water into the wine at the Offertory represent; the union of two sacrifices in the unity of the same sacrifice.

Marriage will have to reach heights like that to succeed in satisfying the utmost demands of love. The husband must be ready to sacrifice all for his wife; the wife must be ready to sacrifice all for her husband. From these conjoined sacrifices, love is made; love likewise demands these conjoined sacrifices.

'What shall I do to show my wife that I love her? What fine deed can I accomplish, what prowess display, what humble, noble act perform?' That is the spirit of chivalry.

And the wife: 'What shall I do to make my husband happy?'

'What will give him pleasure?'

This is the nourishment and the condition of love, the relish for mutual sacrifice.

MARRIAGE AND SACRIFICE.

IT IS not only the highest Catholic doctrine which requires the spirit of sacrifice of the married couple but more immediate common experience.

To live mutually in the closest proximity, in constant forgetfulness of self so that each of the two thinks only of the other requires something more than mere human attraction.

"Do not believe those who tell you that the road of love offers only the softest moss for your feet to tread. There are some sharp pebbles on the trail blazed by Adam and Eve."

The married woman who wrote those lines in verse, said the same thing in prose, a prose strangely poetic:

"To enter into marriage with the idea that someday they will be rid of self is like putting a moth into a piece of wool. Whatever may be the embroidery, the gold threads, the rich colors, the piece of wool is destined to be eaten, chewed with holes and finally completely devoured. It would be necessary for two saints to marry to be sure that no bitter word would ever be exchanged between them; even then, it is not predictable what misunderstandings might crop up. Did not Saint Paul and Saint Barnabas have to separate because they had too many altercations? Then, can these two unfortunate children of Adam and Eve destined to struggle in life with all that life brings in our days of recurring difficulties expect never to have any temptations to wound each other and never to succumb to such provocations?"

If marriage is difficult even when the husband is a saint and the wife is a saint, how can we estimate the sacrifices it will require when the couple are, to put it briefly, but "poor good Christians"?

Here however we are discussing the case of two who are sustained by dogma, morals, and the sacraments. But suppose one of the couple is a sort of pagan, or if baptized, so far removed from his

baptism that nothing recalls any longer the mark of the children of God. What a secret cause for suffering!

Such was the suffering of Elizabeth Leseur who was happy in her married life in the sense that her husband was completely loyal to her but unhappy in her home because on the fundamental point for union, there was disunion, a separated life, the wife being Christian to the degree of astonishing intimacy with God and the husband remaining perfectly satisfied with the superficial life of so-called society.

Even when souls live in closest harmony, there will always be, even in the best of homes, a hidden cause for mutual suffering, which one author calls, "the eternal tragedy of the family, due to the fact that man and woman represent two distinct worlds whose limits never overlap." For woman love is everything. For man it is but a part of life. The woman's whole life rotates about the interior of the home, unless necessity forces her to work to earn a livelihood. The husband lives whole days much more outside the home than in it; he has his business, his office, his store, his shop, his factory. Except for the early days of his married life, he is absorbed more by ambition than by love; in any case, his heart alone is not busy throughout his days, but also and frequently more often, his head.

Sometimes the wife suffers from not having her husband sufficiently to herself; the husband suffers because he appears not to be devoting himself sufficiently to his wife. Over and above other causes of tragedy, here is the eternal and hidden drama. Much virtue is needed by both to accept the suffering they unwittingly cause each other.

A MYSTIC MORAL BOND.

ASIDE from the helps of Faith, two things especially can aid the married couple to practice mutual forbearance and to accept the sacrifices inherent in life together.

The first is the fact of their mutual share in the birth of their progeny.

Saint Augustine speaks beautifully of the two little arms of a child, which draw the father and mother more closely together within the circle of their embrace as if to symbolize the living bond of union the child really is between them.

Even when one's choice of a marriage partner has been perfect, when ardent tenderness is evinced on both sides, there can still develop a period of tenseness and strained relations. Who can best reconcile the two souls momentarily at odds, upset for a time, or somewhat estranged?

The child.

Someone has said it well: "Life is long, an individual changes in the course of ten, fifteen, twenty years shared with another. If the couple that has had a fall out, has known love in its fullness! I mean by that the love of hearts and souls above all... if the two have the noble and deep memories which constitute our true nourishment during our voyage on earth, if they are above all bound together by the children that their love has brought into the world, then there is a good chance that even though they are caught by the undertow of passion, they will emerge safe and sound."

In addition to having children... that bond of love between the father and mother even in the greatest stress and strain... what most contributes to a speedy reconciliation after the clashes that eventually arise or the misunderstandings which set them at odds is the thought that they must endure, they must remain together.

What is to be thought of the following practice, which is becoming quite customary? In the preparation of the trousseau, only the bride's initial is engraved on the silverware or embroidered on the linen. Does it not seem to be a provision for the possibility of a future separation?

By the constant repetition of the idea that man is fickle and that "her husband is the only man a woman can never get used to," the novel, the theater, the movies, set the stamp of approval on the "doctrine" of the broken marriage bond as something normal, something to be expected.

"On the contrary," says Henriette Charasson, who is a married woman and an author quoted before, "if husbands and wives realized that they were united for life, if they knew that nothing could permit them to establish another family elsewhere, how vigilant they would be not to let their precious and singular love be weakened; how they would seek, throughout their daily ups and downs, to keep vibrant, burning, and radiant, the love which binds them not only by the bond of their flesh but by the bond of their soul."

We must thank God if He has blessed our home by giving us many precious children; thank Him also for the Christian conviction which we received formerly in our homes, convictions which will never permit us to consider the possibility of the least fissure in our own family now.

A FATHER'S ANSWER TO HIS DAUGHTER.

IN THE book "My Children and I" by Jerome K. Jerome, which is as full of humor as of common sense, a young girl tells her father that she is frightened at the possibility of love's brevity.

"Love," she says, "is only a stratagem of nature to have fun at our expense. He will tell me that I am everything to him. That will last six months, maybe a year if I am lucky, provided I don't come home with a red nose from walking in the wind; provided he doesn't catch me with my hair in curlers. It is not I whom he needs but what I represent to him of youth, novelty, mystery. And when he shall be satisfied in that?..."

Her father answers, "When the wonder and the poetry of desire shall be extinguished what will remain for you will be what already existed before the desire. If passion alone binds you, then God help you! If you have looked for pleasure only, Poor You! But, if behind the lover, there is a man (let us add a Christian); if behind this supposed goddess, sick with love, there is an upright and courageous woman (again let us add Christian); then, life is before you, not behind you. To live is to give not to receive. Too few realize that it is the work which is the joy not the pay; the game, not the points scored; the playing, not the gain. Fools marry, calculating the advantages they can draw from marriage, and that results in absolutely nothing. But the true rewards of marriage are called work, duty, responsibility. There are names more beautiful than goddess, angel, star, and queen; they are wife and mother.

Marriage is a sacrifice.

In order to live these four last words, "Marriage is a sacrifice," it is not enough to have started off on a good footing, to be enthusiastic about fine ideals, to put all hope in mutual tenderness.

Since marriage calls for more than ordinary sacrifice, it will be necessary in order to remain faithful to the habit of sacrifice, to have more than ordinary helps.

We have already meditated on the similarity between the Eucharist and marriage; we have seen that not only is there a bond of resemblance between these two sacraments but that there is in the

Eucharist, above all in participation in the Eucharistic sacrifice and in Holy Communion a singular help for the married.

Prayer together must also be a help. Someone has rightly said, “The greatest sign of conjugal love is not given by encircling arms in an embrace but by bended knees in common prayer.

In his “Confessions,” Saint Augustine describes his last evening with his mother at Ostia. It is worth quoting. When a husband and wife have reached such a degree of soul-union in God, they can face all life’s tempests without trembling.

“Forgetting the past and looking toward the future, we pondered together in Your Presence, O my God, the living Truth, on what the eternal life of the elect would be like... We came to this conclusion: The sensible pleasures of the flesh in their intensest degree and in all the attractiveness that material things can have, offer nothing that can compare with the sweetness of the life beyond, nor do they even deserve mention. In a transport of love, we tried to lift ourselves to You there...”

‘I must understand more clearly than in the past how essential it is to be rooted in prayer and if possible in prayer together.’

‘I will meditate on this again.’

TRANSPORTED TOGETHER.

WE ARE not considering the word “transported” in its emotional and rapturous sense, not as a paroxysm of exaltation, but rather in the sense of an ascent in a vehicle toward a determined destination.

Marriage is a trip for two. A trip. They travel ahead, enjoying mutual happiness on earth even as their destination gets nearer; and farther on, over there, up yonder, they shall both have the happiness of paradise.

Do I have my destination, our common destination, sufficiently before my eyes... sanctity here below, then death; then in the next life, the reward for our mutual efforts on earth?

How quickly we slip along hardly noticing our advance; I am scarcely aware of having started on the way. How distant the end seems; it escapes my sight; I am all taken up with what is right before me; I can’t see the forest for the trees.

Am I advancing? In sanctity? In union with God? In patience?

In purity? In charity? In generosity?

How many questions? Am I really asking them of myself? And if I am, how must I answer them if I want to be honest?

But I am not alone. This is a trip in company with others. We are several; we are two not counting the children.

How do I conduct myself toward this company, my co-travelers?

How do I act toward the partner of my life?

A recent “before and after” cartoon gave a series of pictures indicating changes in attitude toward one’s life companion:

During the engagement period, the young man is holding the umbrella very solicitously over his fiancée's head with no regard for the rain pouring down on him. Shortly after marriage, he holds the umbrella between them so that each receives an equal share of the raindrops. A long time later in marriage, the husband is no longer concerned about his wife; he holds the umbrella over his head and lets his wife get soaked to saturation.

Is that a reality or only an accusation? Selfishness so quickly regains its empire. It is not always bad will; inattention, perhaps, plain and simple. Yes, but isn't even that too bad?

What happened to all the little attentions of courtship and the honeymoon days? Those countless delicate considerations? The constant thought of the other?

There is the root of much suffering especially for the wife who is keener, more affectionate, more sensitive; she thinks she is cast off. She lets it be known on occasions. Oh, not bluntly, but with that subtle art she has for allusions, implications, and expressive silences. She might upbraid: "If you were in such a situation, if you were with such and such a person, I am sure you would be so obliging, so engaging, so attentive. But it is only I. Consequently you don't have to bother, isn't that so?" And, little by little, bitterness creeps in. It was nothing at all to start with. They made something — matter for friction.

I know a priest who wanted to preserve until he was at least eighty all the freshness of his priesthood: "I shall never let myself get used to celebrating Holy Mass." I should be able to say the same thing in regard to the sacrament I have received, the sacrament of marriage: "I will preserve my love in all its freshness. I shall remain considerate, delicately attentive. I shall do everything in my power to travel forward together not only in peace but in light and mutual joy.

SINGLE THOUGH TWO.

ANNA DE NOAILLES, a French poetess, summed up her unhappy married life in the words, "I am alone with someone."

It is an expressive but sinister remark.

People marry in order to be two, but two in one, not to continue to be alone, alone although with someone.

Aloneness for two can have a double cause:

1. Waiting too long to have children through a mutual agreement at the beginning of married life.
2. Loving each other too much perhaps. Too much, selfishly of course. Man and wife united, together, yes; and in this sense, it is not the solitude of which Anna de Noailles spoke. But if their union for two deserves rather to be called selfishness for two, it is not a true union.

These are the reefs upon which many a marriage has been wrecked.

Granted that if they do nothing to prevent generation, they do not sin... at least not against the law of chastity for marriage; but besides going counter to the law of fecundity, they are running the risk of sterility.

If they wait too long to have their brood, the nest hardens, loses its softness and adaptability. They get so accustomed to being only two that the presence of a third, even though the fruit of their union, does not seem desirable. There will always be time later, later! Let us enjoy each other first.

Selfishness for two: conjugal solitude. And let us add, a risk for later on. The wife will probably suffer from not being able to be a mother; the husband gets used to seeing in her only a wife. "It is in springtime," the proverb picturesquely says, "that the father bird learns to do his duty." The wife is very imprudent if she lets her husband prolong unduly a sort of bachelorhood; let her teach him how to assume his duties without too much delay.

There can be another reason more harmful still for this being alone though two and that is born of opposition of characters.

Generally, it does not appear in the first years of married life.

Everything is marvelous then, sunshine and moonlight.

Though there may be exceptions, they are rare.

But there comes a time when tension creeps in, more or less restrained, then hidden resentment, finally opposition if not with weapons at least by tongue lashings, sullen silences, disagreeable attitudes. There is in every man, even a married man the stuff of an old bachelor; in every woman, even a married woman, something of... well, a person shouldn't really use that word to speak of unmarried women.

When husbands and wives notice their rising irritability, they should take hold of their hearts with both hands so to speak and refrain from words they will regret soon after. If they have the courage, let them have an understanding with each other as soon as possible. They should learn not to notice every little thing; to forget with untiring patience all the little pricks; to remember only the joys they lived through together; to make a bouquet of them, not a faded bouquet like dried-out artificial flowers that are kept in a drawer, but alive and fresh, beautiful enough to be put in full view on the mantle-piece.

Everything that is typical of the single life is taboo. They are united. They are to remain united. Two in one. In one: It is not always easy; it is always necessary.

MARRIAGE AND THE PRIESTHOOD. (1) Some Similarities.

THERE is a greater resemblance between the sacrament of matrimony and the sacrament of Holy Orders than is immediately evident. The encyclical "Casti Connubii" of Pope Pius XI does not fail to point it out. Here are a few similarities:

1. Although the sacrament of matrimony does not, like Holy Orders, impart a special character to the soul, it does consecrate "ministers" appointed to communicate grace. The priest is but a witness at the marriage. It is not the priest who marries but the man and woman who marry themselves who by exchanging their mutual "yes" give to each other more divine life. A sublime dignity, which we have considered before.

2. Both marriage and Holy Orders give and sustain life. Holy Orders, supernatural life; marriage, natural life. The object of marriage, however, is not only the formation of bodies, but also the education of souls; procreation is nothing if it does not duplicate itself in education. It is up to the parents to get their children baptized, to prepare them for their First Holy Communion, to help in

their religious formation, to assist them to remain in grace, a ministry which paves the way for the ministry of the priest, makes it possible and doubles its value.

3. Marriage and Holy Orders are both “social sacraments”; they are not intended only and principally for the personal sanctification of the recipients but are directed more especially to the general good of the Christian community. The priest is not a priest for himself; he is ordained for the sheep entrusted to him; he is commissioned to work for the flock the bishop designates for him. Parents are not married only for their own good; they are married for the good of the children who will be born of them.

When the number of priests decreases, what harm results for the spiritual future of society! (Isn't today's terrible proof of this a real anguish for the heart?) If marriage is not undertaken by the fit, or the fit determined to fulfill its obligations, what harm will ensue for the temporal future of society!

4. Those who receive the sacrament of matrimony are vowed just as truly as is the priest to the exercise of charity.

For the priest it is clear. A bishop is established in the state of perfection by his very function, which is to spend himself — to the giving of his life if necessary — for the welfare of the faithful. Because he is perpetually in the state of complete charity, we say that he is in the state of perfection, perfection consisting in the more or less extensive and permanent exercise of charity. Priests share in this state of holiness of the bishop. They must spend themselves for their sheep, be ready day and night to bring them spiritual help, to do all in their power to instruct them in the Word of God, to prevent them from losing their souls, to lead them back to the fold if they are tempted to go astray.

The married are, in their turn, and in a broad sense, established to a degree in a state, which can, if they live it as they should, bring them to high perfection.

Ought not the husband exert himself with his whole soul for the well-being of his wife and children; should he not work and spend himself for love of them?

And what about the wife and mother? The pelican appears on the chasuble of the priest to symbolize his duty to imitate Christ by giving his very heart's blood for the faithful. Could it not also be a symbol for maternal sacrifice?

MARRIAGE AND THE PRIESTHOOD (2) Responsibilities.

PRIESTS receive Holy Orders at the foot of the altar, so too do the bride and groom receive the sacrament of matrimony.

It is as if the Church appointed the same place for the reception of both sacraments because she wished to emphasize the relationship between matrimony and Holy Orders.

Now that we have seen the points of resemblance between them, we are ready to draw some profitable conclusions:

1. The two who are married are called to help each other in the life of grace. Therefore, the couple will become channels in the communication of grace in proportion to each one's own wealth in the divine life. What a long preparation the priest must have for his priesthood — long years in the seminary, the reception of minor Orders before admittance to the priesthood, the retreats before each of his ordinations.

By contrast, how many enter upon marriage with no preparation. Even when they do prepare for it and give it thought, how superficial and brief their preparation is; how easily lost are the effects, by a flood of social events and distractions. Strange conduct!

2. The two joined by marriage will have to propagate life, and what is more, a life which will resemble theirs. A most frequent comment made over a new baby, a comment which is quite telling is “Why, he’s his father all over,” or “She’s a vest-pocket edition of her mother.” What if this is to be true morally as well? What am I, the father, like? Or I, the mother? Do I really want this little one to resemble me? Oh, no! I want it to be better, much better than I!

But am I free, as I go along, to weaken what I expect to transmit and what I expect to keep for myself? No. I can refrain from begetting children, but if I do have them, I must know that they will resemble me. I ought not to have to say as someone said, “My children will be like me, but you will have to forgive them for it.”

Is that not a thought that should move me strongly to sanctify myself?

Since I am not only to beget children, but I must also rear them, ought I not examine myself on the degree of my virtue? Is it such that I can really contribute to the advancement of other souls, to contribute to the growth of the Mystical Body of Christ, to intensify the supernatural in the souls around me — my partner in marriage, my children?

The Cure of Ars once asked a priest who was complaining over his lack of influence on his parishioners: “Have you fasted, taken the discipline, struggled in prayer?” In other words, “Have you pushed your efforts in prayer, penance, and sanctification to the highest point?”

Perhaps I complain of my powerlessness with one of the children. Have I taken all the means to draw down God’s maximum graces upon me? Souls cost dearly. To be sure, there is always individual free will to contend with; it can resist God; it can resist the prayer and the parents’ striving after holiness. I may not get discouraged. Have I not perhaps been measuring out my generosity a bit too carefully? I shall try to reach the heights. We cannot lift up unless we ourselves are higher.

I should see, in the light of the parallel between the sacrament of matrimony and the sacrament of Holy Orders, the extent of my responsibilities. Like priests, I have a heavy responsibility. A magnificent responsibility but a frightening responsibility! If I am only so-so, I shall — according to the logic of things and barring a miracle of God’s grace — rear souls who are only so-so.

Is that what I want?

Have I up to now measured how far-reaching my mission actually is?

MASCULINE TREASON.

WOMEN have their faults; while they are generally more irritating than man’s, they are less to be feared. Man more readily betrays; he is more truly all of a piece; when he falls, it is the whole way.

That should not cause a wife to be constantly on needles and pins; it is harmful for the man and she does herself great harm by so acting, for nothing will as quickly drive her husband into another woman’s arms as jealousy in his lawful wife.

The knowledge of man's tendency should incite the husband to watch over himself more closely to avoid imprudence that might run into flirtation, then into a friendship, then into adultery. The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak, above all in the strong sex.

Even in cases where the quality of the person, the honor of the family name, nobility of origin would seem to give every guarantee of perseverance in good, we sometimes meet lamentable examples of a man's infidelity to his home.

In the diary of Eugenie de Caucy, the second wife of Marshal Oudinot (1767-1848), it is related that on Sunday of shrove-tide 1820, there was a very spectacular showing of "Le Carnaval de Venise" at the Opera.

Charles Ferdinand, the Duke de Berry had left the theatre before the last act to escort his wife to her carriage. Upon turning to go back to his box, he was mortally wounded by the anarchist Louvel.

He asked for a priest and then made another request: "I want to see all my children." The people about him knew only of Mademoiselle, the four year old daughter, the child of his marriage with the Duchesse.

His wife, the Duchess, did not dare to understand his request.

He explained, "My wife, I admit, I have several children.

"Through a liaison of mine in England I had two daughters."

He died shortly after, asking mercy for his murderer and regretting from the depths of his soul, a little late to be sure, his unfaithful conduct.

Many thoughts suggest themselves on hearing such a story. First of all, think of dying in such a setting! Yet, there is certainly nothing wrong with attending a play if the play is morally good; we just have to remember to be always ready wherever we are; death can strike us in society and even while we are in the proximate occasion of sin.

Another more appalling thought is the wife's ignorance of her husband's life. How can a man so betray the one to whom he has pledged his faith? Furthermore, how brazen, to ask a young girl to be his wife, the cherished companion of his life after giving if not his heart at least his body to another woman! Truly, man is not charming! Not that woman is incapable of betrayal and of giving herself unlawfully, but we should like to think that it happens more rarely.

Finally a third observation comes to mind — the picture of this man lying in his blood, confessing his past and by this act of humility, which is to his credit, trying to redeem the failings of the past.

Thanks to God's grace, I have not similar failings on my conscience. But are there not many thoughts, many desires, certain types of reading, much imprudence even in act, and unwarranted liberties of which I have been guilty? If those about me knew what I really am, how would they judge me?

MARRIAGE AND THE COUNSELS. (1) The Spirit of Poverty, Chastity and Obedience.

IS IT possible to arrive at perfection without following the evangelical counsels?

Put in this way, the question can have two answers depending on whether the effective practice of the counsels is to be understood or simply the spirit of the counsels.

1. Perfection consists in the exercise of charity as the duty of one's state implies it. "Be ye perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect" was said to all not just to priests and religious.

And again to all, "You shall love the Lord, your God, with your whole heart, and with your whole soul and with your whole mind and with all your strength."

The perfection of charity is commanded to all and not only counseled.

That the evangelical counsels are a help to the exercise of the virtue of charity for those who have elected to live by them is certain; they are not the only means.

The Gospel makes it perfectly clear: There is the observance of the Commandments — a necessity for all; there is the observance of the counsels — for those who desire it; those only would be obliged to adopt this second means who have evidence that without them they could not attain their salvation — a rare case indeed.

2. But it appears to be a very difficult thing to arrive at the perfection of charity without adopting the spirit of the counsels.

In fact, there are three great obstacles to the perfect service of God: excessive attachment to the goods of earth; the tendency to seek purely selfish satisfactions where the affections of the heart are concerned; finally the habit of obeying not so much God's will for our life as personal caprice and the false demands of the world

From this, it is evident that the pursuit of perfection presupposes the spirit of detachment; it means using things, as Saint Paul would say, as if we did not use them at all. That suggestion is good not only for life in the cloister but every bit as good if not more so, in view of the greater difficulty, in the simple life of observing the Commandments. The spirit of poverty in either case is essential.

The pursuit of perfection while living in the midst of the world likewise calls for the spirit of chastity, the chastity of the heart — not to the point of having to deprive themselves of everything as those do who are vowed to the virginal state, but to the point of the privations necessary to meet the demands of the conjugal state. Therefore, the spirit of chastity is equally essential.

Striving for perfection in the midst of the world still allows the individual entire liberty regarding many of the details of life, the so-called good things of life as well as ideas, companionship, dress. The soldier Ernest Psichari yearned as he used to say, "to be free of everything except Jesus Christ."

Strive for obedience to God alone who said, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and all the rest shall be added unto you." I must not let "the rest" take precedence over "the Kingdom."

Obedience to God should not be marked by formal passivity but by vision and conviction. Let me measure the distance from the place I am now to the summit of Christianity.

MARRIAGE AND THE COUNSELS. (2) Restoring Some Harmony.

THIS subject has too great significance for one meditation only.

Before the Fall, there was a triple harmony in man:

Harmony between God and the soul: Adam and Eve conversed familiarly with the Most High who used to walk with them at twilight in Paradise; He often left His footprints in the sands of their garden.

Harmony within man himself between his body and soul:

The senses were active but they were submissive to reason and will; concupiscence existed but it was just concupiscence not evil concupiscence; the powers of desire were not inordinate.

Harmony all about man, between him and nature: The animals were subject to him and were not hostile to him. Inanimate nature did not refuse its secrets to his work, which was but a joyous extension of his activity and not as it has become in part at least — fatiguing labor. “You shall eat your bread in the sweat of your brow.”

Then came the Fall. Immediately this beautiful balance was destroyed. Man revolted against God. The result: Man’s senses rose up against right reason, and against the will enlightened by faith; nature and all about man turned hostile. There would be wild beasts and venomous creatures among the animals; the earth would resist his toil and the labor of generations to come, revealing its treasures only with discouraging parsimony and at the cost of fearful toil and sweat.

What should be most profitable for my meditation is the consideration of the revolt in man himself, his lower powers against his higher powers. From then on, man would have to struggle against the triple and fatal inclination, which was born in him:

An inclination to take an exaggerated possession of the goods of the earth, the fruit of concupiscence of the eyes:

Man will rush after all that glitters. How many crimes have been committed because of an unregulated love of money!

An inclination to seek after excessive carnal satisfactions contrary to true discipline of the senses and the commands of God. What crimes have not the follies of lust produced!

An inclination to pride: Man, proud of his liberty, but not sufficiently concerned about keeping it in dependence on reason and the Divine Will, runs the risk of forgetting the majesty and sovereignty of God and the prime duty of obedience to the Master of all.

How can one struggle effectively against this triple and dangerous inclination?

Do violence to self, declare spiritual writers with good common sense. First and foremost among them in suggesting this technique is Saint Ignatius of Loyola. Choose the counterpart: poverty, chastity, obedience.

Religious men and women make it the matter of a vow. Their lives serve as an inspiring example to draw forward those whose lesser courage or less demanding vocation have kept in the common way of life.

I shall hold religious life in high esteem. Although my vocation is different, I shall learn to live in a wise spirit of detachment from created things, of chastity according to my state, and of obedience to the Holy Spirit.

MARRIAGE AND VOWS.

THE problem of personal vocation, as I have seen from my meditations, is not a problem to be solved in the abstract, in pure theory, but in the concrete, taking each particular case into consideration. The best vocation in an individual case is not the vocation which is best in itself but the best in fact, that is the one which Divine Providence prepares for each person.

I have recognized mine quite clearly. I have no worry on that score.

Without wishing to belittle in the least the merits of those who pronounce religious vows — for they are privileged souls — can I not in a way compare my life with theirs and find a resemblance between them?

In the writings of his mother, which the poet Lamartine published, we find these lines:

“Today I attended the Investment of some hospital sisters. The sermon which was addressed to them was beautiful: The speaker told them that they had chosen for life a state of penance and of mortification. A crown of thorns was placed upon their heads to symbolize this... I greatly admired their self-sacrifice; but I reflected that the state of a mother of a family can approach the perfection of theirs if she fulfills her duties.

“A person doesn’t give enough thought to the fact that when she marries, she also makes a vow of poverty since she practically puts her fortune into her husband’s hands, and that he has something to say about how she spends money.

“She makes a vow of obedience to her husband and a vow of chastity inasmuch as she is not permitted to seek to please any other man. She also dedicates herself to the exercise of charity toward her husband and her children; she has the obligation to care for them in sickness and to give them her wise counsel.”

Isn’t there much truth in this comparison? Evidently, in the case of marriage, husbands and wives are largely compensated for the sacrifices they have to make by the joy that comes to them from life together. In the virginal state, there is no such human compensation. That is no reason to underestimate the value of the married state. Because the one state is more beautiful, it does not follow that the other is not very beautiful.

It may well be that a certain father or mother who hesitated before entering the married state because they felt called to the life of consecrated virginity fulfilled God’s plans for religious vocations better by their marriage; God used them as instruments for a series of vocations that would develop among their offspring.

When (Saint) Pius X was promoted to the bishopric of Mantua, he paid a visit to his mother at Riese. “Mamma, look at my beautiful episcopal ring.” His eighty year old mother let her wrinkled fingers pass over the ring thoughtfully. Then she said, “It is true, Giuseppe; your ring is beautiful; but you would not have had it, if I had not had this one,” and she held up her wedding ring.

THE SOCIAL IDEAL.

YOUNG Maurice Retour found himself at the head of a textile factory upon the early death of his father.

Shortly before his marriage, he wrote to his bride-to-be.

“To know that more than three hundred persons depend on you for their daily bread, to be certain that with work, intelligence, and patience you can make them earn more, what else would you need to become inspired with the desire to discover all possible improvements.”

He let his fiancée know that he planned to have her share in the furtherance of his enterprise. He added:

“To be a Christian, to have the happiness of knowing your wife will one day work hand in hand with you, to feel that you possess this sister-soul to help bring to success the noble and beautiful

ideal you dreamed of accomplishing is almost too great a bliss; it's enough to make you beside yourself with joy.”

The young industrialist, in full agreement with his wife, set himself to the duty of providing the desired improvements: a free Saturday, a cafeteria for the workers, a benefit fund. Naturally, he was criticized by his fellow industrialists who did not have a like Christian sense. But he held his own and went even farther. Sometimes before some of his reforms, which had as their only purpose better conditions for the workers, a number of the workers themselves either from force of habit or from ill-will evidenced displeasure. He still kept to his plan, tried to win them over and was patient with them.

In spite of his firm principles, the exactness of his economic and sociological knowledge, his good judgment, his Christian spirit, which guaranteed the usefulness of his efforts, he was still eager to be supported in his labors; he told his wife his difficulties and asked for her opinion and advice. He counted on her either to help him to study and to grow in his understanding of social problems or more often still to have a part in his work.

In the fight against alcoholism, in the care of the workers' children, in the visitation of the sick, in planning for big celebrations, in organizing vacation camps, what a wide field there was for the wife of an industrialist!

Maurice Retour did not believe in getting himself involved in so many activities that he would neglect his factory; interest in free schools, attendance at Saint Vincent de Paul meetings were all fine, but they should not separate him from his factory.

“We ought to think first of our workers, of their children, of those who are in our direct contact, in order not to scatter our efforts in all directions uselessly. Let us try to sow a bit of happiness about us... Let us give as much as we can to others... We are responsible for the good we do not do... All our life spent in this work, hand in hand, united in the same ideal, the same faith, the same great love, would not be too much.”

From the Western Front in 1915, he often wrote asking for news: “Tell me about our dear workers of whom I think so often.”

What a god-send when a wife finds in her husband such a magnificent social spirit; when an industrialist finds in his wife someone who understands him and backs him up!
