

"LOVE ALONE CREATES"

LOVE AT THE HEART OF *HUMANAE VITAE*

■ BY PROF. MARIA FEDORYKA

The Church's destiny to be a "sign of contradiction" is perhaps nowhere as keenly felt as in her teaching on contraception. This teaching is at the absolute center of God's plan for humanity. The love that the Church's teaching on contraception seeks to preserve and foster is inseparable from the love that wells up from the depths of God's own being and pours itself out as a gift, bringing into existence finite souls — both angelic and human — who are then called into an eternal relationship of love with God Himself. Humans, unlike angels, are mysteriously invited by God to be true co-creators, with Him, of new immortal human souls. If the prince of this world is at the same time the Enemy of God, it stands to reason that this dimension of human existence would be a focal point of the battle between him and God.

While the Church has always held to the teaching reiterated by *Humanae Vitae*, I believe that the re-expression of this teaching begins a development of doctrine in the matter of the generation of new human life and in the area of sexual morality.

In it, Paul VI penetrates deep into the anthropological foundations of this perennial teaching, illuminating with almost startling clarity firstly, the absolute centrality of love to the spousal act, and secondly, that that love is not simply brought to the equation by the disposition of the spouses, but first and foremost defines the act in its very nature.

With regard to the absolute centrality of love: On the one



"Only love creates!" The well-known words of the great Polish martyr St. Maximilian Kolbe (photo below) are not merely poetic, but express an essential truth

senses and of the spirit" (*Humanae Vitae* 9).

John Paul II's far-reaching exploration of *Humanae Vitae* in his *Theology of the Body* illumines this reality, showing that in the marital act, the love of the spouses becomes "embodied." This means that the marriage act does not consist of physical gestures that are merely signs pointing beyond themselves to the love of the spouses; rather, in the act, love "takes on flesh," endowing flesh with an interior space by its very nature fashioned to be filled

out with spousal love. Almost wholly unique among bodily acts, this act therefore has an *intrinsic meaning*, so that it has only one proper way of being engaged in: as "filled out" by the self-giving love of husband and wife.

Any other use of it vacates it of its proper soul, and violates its nature.

Now something marvelous comes to light. As we have seen, love is made up of the two features of union and fruitfulness. But because of the body, several things happen in the case of the marital act.

Firstly, love takes on *concrete outlines*, outlines that "imitate" in an analogical way the characteristics of the love between man and woman. We see this in the quality of intimacy and depth proper to sexuality, in the gestures of the spouses' bodily self-giving and receiving, in the "incarnation" of the closeness and the joy of union in the bodily experiences.

Secondly, the love between the spouses is augmented, and affords them a deeper kind of union not achieved without the participation of the body; thanks to the body, no union is as deep and as total as the union of husband and wife in the marital act.

hand, love does not consist only of the union of two persons established through a mutual self-giving and receiving, but to it also belongs a fruitfulness arising from that union (*Humanae vitae* 9).

In the union of love, as each person "dies" to himself to live for the other, new factors are born enriching and deepening the life of the two-made-one, factors that are constitutive of the love itself. On the other hand, all new being and new life necessarily has its origin in love: only love contains the generosity that stands behind the act of giving to another being its own existence. The well-

known words of St. Maximilian Kolbe that "Only love creates!" are not merely poetic, but express an essential truth.

Love, then, consists of these two inseparable elements of union and the fruit that flows from within its own depth.

With regard to Paul VI's insight that love structures the spousal act: Paul VI tells us that the love of the spouses exists as something "fully human," and therefore is both "of the



And thirdly, we discover that by the gift of God, and in cooperation with Him, a particular incarnation of the fruitfulness belongs to this particular union of the deepest and most intimate kind, which corresponds in its greatness to the depth and totality of the union: the coming into existence of an immortal person, another agent of love expanding the circle of love between the spouses. The child is truly a "fruit of love," and not just an "effect" of some cause external to itself.

And so a wonderful exchange takes place: on the one hand, the body is raised by the presence within it of the spiritual reality of love; on the other hand, the soul receives from the body the capacity for a new depth of union and the awe-inspiring capacity to participate in the creation of a new human person.

No angel can co-create, because an angel has no body to share with another.

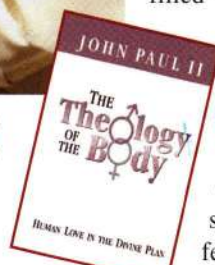
Benedict XVI captures this exalted status of embodied persons when he writes in *Deus caritas est* that the human person is a "unity in duality... in which spirit and matter compenetrates, and in which each is brought to a new nobility." (Chapter 5)

The "laws inscribed on [the] nature" of man and woman (*Humanae Vitae* 31) turn out not to be merely physical laws connecting conception to union, forbidding their separation. Rather, it is the law of love, now embodied in the marital act in a concrete way, that connects the two. The central teaching of *Humanae Vitae* states: "It is necessary that each marital act remain ordained in itself to the procreating of human life. (Par 11) There is an unbreakable connection between the unitive meaning and the procreative meaning [of the marital act], and both are inherent in the marital act... And if both essential meanings are preserved, that of union and procreation, the marital act fully maintains its capacity for true mutual love. (Par 12)"

Humanae Vitae tells us that it is impossible to separate the union of love from its proper fruit: to remove the fruit is not to retain the union alone, but to dismantle the act as an act of love. From all of this it becomes clear why the attempt to separate the fruit from its proper union may not be made.



Above, Cardinal Ratzinger with Pope John Paul II. Benedict XVI wrote in *Deus Caritas Est* that the human person is a "unity in duality." John Paul II's explored human life and love in his *Theology of the Body*



If the spouses are not open to the fruit organically related to the union, they witness to the fact that they have not entered into the act as an act of unitive love. The bodily act — so sacred in its nature as the deepest act of love possible between human persons — is now no longer "ensouled" by the love for which it was fashioned, but is as it were "dead," having become an instrument used for the achievement of some other end, usually pleasure.

Humanae Vitae explicitly addresses those who claim that the Church's teaching on contraception threatens the full expression of love between spouses. It shows with luminous clarity that it is precisely this concern which on the contrary forbids contraception. Responding to Paul VI's call to bishops to "educate" and to "guard and interpret" this teaching, in the *Theology of the Body* John Paul II goes on to illuminate at great depth the laws of love governing the spousal act, and exhort spouses to "re-read in truth" (104:8) these laws in their own lives so as to enter into the gift of spousal love as fully as possible. The consequences of disregarding the teaching of *Humanae Vitae* are described in the prophetic sections of the encyclical in some detail, and the astonishing accuracy of the predictions has been well documented in the years since its writing. (See, for example, Mary Eberstadt's work.)

Reflections on these consequences by many theologians and philosophers have led to yet a deeper understanding of the truth of the encyclical's central doctrine.

The more sacred and exalted, the more central some dimension of human life, the

more courage and fortitude are needed on the part of the human person in living it. Withholding our obedience to the Church's teaching does not gain us true happiness (*Humanae Vitae* 31), but only keeps us from receiving the gift of God; whereas faithful obedience under the pressure of suffering carves out depths in us that are destined to be filled with an abundance of life, even on this side of heaven.

Many of His disciples, when they heard it, said, "This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?" But Jesus said to them, "Do you take offense at this?...The words that

I have spoken to you are spirit and life...Many of his disciples drew back and no longer went about with him.

Jesus said to the twelve, "Do you also wish to go away?" Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life."

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