

[This chapter is from the book, *Premarital Sex and Love: In the Light of Human Experience and Following Jesus* by Paul Flaman. Copyright 1999 by Paul J. P. Flaman, St. Joseph's College, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada T6G 0B3. Any feedback you have can be emailed to: pflaman@ualberta.ca **Note:** This chapter has been published as an article with some minor modifications as: "Christian Anthropology With Respect to Sex, Marriage and Love," *Journal of the Fellowship of Catholic Scholars / Amicale de Savants Catholiques Canada*, Spring 2004, 2-15.]

## **CHAPTER 5: SOME FUNDAMENTAL ELEMENTS OF A CHRISTIAN ANTHROPOLOGY WITH RESPECT TO SEX, MARRIAGE AND LOVE**

In this chapter some fundamental elements of a Christian anthropology with respect to sex, marriage and love are presented. Chapters II-IV, as well as Chapter I, provide a foundation for this. In this chapter, I present a personal synthesis, taking into account also some of the insights of a number of modern or contemporary Christian theologians and ethicists. Since this chapter is building on the previous chapters and is meant to be complementary to them, many of the points presented in them are not repeated here. With respect to themes that overlap and cross-references, see the index.

### **A. An Integral Vision is Needed**

To adequately respond to specific issues such as premarital sex, the proper expression of love and affection in premarital relationships, marriage preparation and sex education (see Chs. VI-IX), we need an integral vision. When Jesus was asked a specific question about divorce (see Mt 19:3-12 and Mk 10:2-12), he referred his interlocutors to "the beginning", to God's original plan for human sexuality and marriage. As part of his answer, he recalled certain fundamental truths concerning

human identity and the man-woman relationship.

With regard to the many contemporary questions on marriage, procreation and the family, Pope John Paul II thinks that among the answers that Christ would give, "He would continue to refer mainly to the 'beginning'", since an integral or total vision of human beings "must be constructed from the 'beginning'." In our modern age, with much specialization and the development of various disciplines, this integral vision "may easily be rejected and replaced by multiple partial conceptions" which dwell "on one or other aspect of the *compositum humanum*" and do not reach or leave an integral vision "outside their own field of vision." This does not mean that we must renounce modern science and its results, but that "through all the single elements of contemporary science" it is always necessary "to arrive at what is fundamental and essentially personal..."<sup>1</sup>

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1. Pope John Paul II, General Audience of April 2, 1980, *Original Unity of Man and Woman: Catechesis on the Book of Genesis* (Boston: St. Paul Editions, 1981), 172-5. Cf. also the Second Vatican Council, GS, 8, which teaches that, "Specialization in any human activity can at length deprive a man of a comprehensive view of reality"(Abbott); and Pope Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae*, (Boston: Daughters of St. Paul, NC News Service Translation, 1968), n. 7: "The problem of birth, like every other problem regarding human life, is to be considered, beyond partial perspectives - whether of the biological or psychological, demographic or sociological orders - in the light of an integral vision of man and of his vocation, not only his natural and earthly, but also his supernatural and eternal vocation."

In this chapter a number of biblical texts (e.g. Mt 19:3-12) are referred to that were treated in Ch. II. In that chapter we focused on the intended meaning of the human authors or editors of the Bible in the light of some of the best biblical scholarship. This chapter includes some developments in insight and language that are meant to be consistent with God's Word, but which go beyond what is found explicitly in the Bible. See also Ch. III.D above regarding the development of doctrine; and Pontifical Biblical Commission, "The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church," *Origins: CNS Documentary Service*, Jan. 6, 1994, 497-524. Any biblical references in this chapter are not meant to "prove" the validity of later developments but are given for comparison, since many authentic developments in Christian theology have involved reflection on biblical texts guided by the Holy Spirit. For overviews of the usage in the Bible and/or respective biblical theology regarding many terms used in this chapter such as God, creation, sexuality, marriage, love, good and evil, sin, redemption, virtues and vices, and prayer, see e.g., John McKenzie, *Dictionary of the Bible* (New York: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1965); and Xavier Léon-Dufour, ed., *Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (New York: The Seabury Press, 2nd ed. 1973).

This section outlines a number of essential elements of an integral vision, especially regarding human persons, goods or values, love, sex and marriage, in the light of a Christian understanding of God, Creation, Sin, Incarnation, and Redemption.<sup>2</sup> In the next section we will consider some essential elements of the Christian vocation or calling to follow Jesus, to grow in loving as he loves. In both these sections, data rooted in Christian faith in God's revelation is related to data of human experience. A holistic Christian anthropology is consistent with all the data of human experience and Christian faith. In this chapter the attempt is not to present an exhaustive treatment or detailed analysis, but to highlight a number of essentials that are relevant to our topics of premarital sex and love.

### 1. God: "Original" Communion of Persons

According to a fairly recent report eighty-three per cent of Canadians say they believe in God, seventy-nine per cent say they believe in Jesus' divinity, and many say they pray and have

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2. One of the better features of Charles Curran's theology in my opinion is his proposing, as a stance for Christian ethics, "the need to see all human reality in terms of the fivefold Christian mysteries of creation, sin, incarnation, redemption, and resurrection destiny": from his *Moral Theology: A Continuing Journey* (University of Notre Dame Press, Indiana, 1982), 155. In the light of this stance he thinks a balance can be found between more optimistic and more pessimistic anthropologies. I agree, but here add 'God' to the mysteries or categories and include 'resurrection destiny' under 'redemption'. Other Christian mysteries (realities of which we can have some understanding but never a complete understanding because of their profundity and the limits of our minds) could be named (see, e.g., CCC), but I think these five taken together are broad enough to include them. My including 'God', as the foundation of everything else, is perhaps part of the reason why I think there are more eternal truths and unchanging universal moral norms than does Curran. I appreciate some aspects of his theology, but disagree with a number of his conclusions.

We can also note here that the Christian feminist theologian Mary Aquin O'Neill discusses Christian anthropology in the light of creation in the image of God, the effects of sin and the meaning of the redemption: Ch. 6 in *Freeing Theology: The Essentials of Theology in Feminist Perspective*, ed. by Catherine Mowry LaCugna (San Francisco: HarperCollins Publishers Inc., 1993). Cf. e.g., also Lisa Sowle Cahill, *Between the Sexes: Foundations for a Christian Ethics of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985); and Ronda Chervin, *Feminine, Free and Faithful* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986). There exist a wide range of views among Christian feminists ranging from heterodox to orthodox Christian and Catholic positions.

experienced God.<sup>3</sup> Christians believe that although something can be known about the invisible God from the things he has made, God has most fully revealed himself to us through Jesus Christ (cf. Rm 1:19-20 and Jn 1:1-18). "God is the First and the Last, the beginning and end of everything."(CCC, n. 198) Although God is one and there is no other, God is an inscrutable communion of three divine Persons - Father, Son and Holy Spirit (cf. Mt 28:19) - in perfect reciprocal self-giving love and unity. If human beings, male and female, image God (cf. Gen 1:26-27), both in their humanity and in the communion of persons they form,<sup>4</sup> then to properly understand human beings and relationships, it is necessary to have some understanding of God. God, the "original" communion of persons, is the ultimate source, model and goal of personal communion in human relationships,<sup>5</sup> marital and nonmarital, including premarital relationships.

As LORD, God infinitely transcends everything else; as infinite Love, God is closer to us than we are to ourselves and loves us more than we love ourselves. As Spirit and not having a limited material body, God is present everywhere. Although sex is God's idea, he is not a sexual being, but beyond male and female. Certain images, including sexual images, drawn from human experience, however, can help us to understand and communicate God's qualities. For example, the biblical images of "father" and "husband/bridegroom" can help us to appreciate God's providential care for us, his children (cf. Mt 6:25-34), and that he wants to have a most intimate "spousal" relationship with us (cf., e.g., Is 62:4-5). The image of "mother" can help us to appreciate God's faithful,

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3. Reginald W. Bibby, *Fragmented Gods: The Poverty and Potential of Religion in Canada* (Toronto: Irwin Publishing, 1987), Ch. 5.

4. Cf. Pope John Paul II, General Audience of Nov. 14, 1979, *Original Unity of Man and Woman* (see note 1), 73.

5. Cf. Paul Flaman, *Family Unity: A Christian Perspective* (Muenster, Sask.: St. Peter's Press, 1986 ed.), Ch. III.1.

compassionate and comforting love (cf. Is 49:15 and 66:13). (Such biblical images are not meant to promote a narrow stereotyping since mothers also provide care for their children and fathers also should be faithful and compassionate, for example.) God's goodness infinitely surpasses that of everything else that we experience as good. Indeed, God is not only infinite Love and Truth, He is also infinite Beauty, Wisdom, Justice, Mercy, Life, and so forth. He is Being or Reality in a supreme or absolute sense. God contains every perfection. Unlike finite contingent beings, God, who has no beginning and end, transcends time. He is infinite and eternal, and so does not change (cf. Mal 3:6 and Heb 13:8).<sup>6</sup>

In our experience, including our intersubjective experience, unless we are blinded by pride and prejudice, we experience personal goods or values as the dignity of persons, justice, friendship, truth, self-giving love, fidelity, human life, and so forth as givens. Ultimately, this is because such values transcend ourselves and our appreciation or lack of appreciation of them. They are rooted in the very nature or essence of God. The moral order has its ultimate foundation in God, who is infinitely good, loving and personal.<sup>7</sup> So does human authority, including one's control of oneself,

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6. Cf. Jacques Maritain, *An Introduction to Philosophy* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1979 ed.), 187. Human language about God is often expressed negatively. E.g., the word "infinite" means "not finite", not limited. In speaking of the infinite God whom we cannot completely understand because of our limited minds, we often use images or analogies from finite created realities. E.g., to speak of God as our rock, maker and liberator, or as good, loving, wise, just, and personal. Although such images and analogies help us to understand God to some extent and enable us to communicate about God, we should keep in mind that with every analogy there is not only some similarity, but also some difference. E.g. while there is some similarity between human goodness, beauty and wisdom, and God's, nevertheless divine goodness, beauty and wisdom infinitely surpass even the most exalted forms that we find in human beings.

7. Cf., e.g., Dietrich von Hildebrand (Catholic), *Christian Ethics* (New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1953), Ch. 14 "God and Values"; James Gustafson (Protestant), *Ethics From a Theocentric Perspective*, 2 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981 and 1984); and Pope John Paul II, VS, Ch. 2.I regarding "Freedom and Law".

which to be properly exercised, needs to be subordinate to God's absolute authority.(cf. Ac 5:29)

Since God is a mystery of mutual love (*agape*) and loves all people and the rest of his creation, for us to really "know" God and for God to "abide" in us, it is necessary that we allow God to fill our "hearts" with his love and that we love one another.(cf. Rm 5:5; and 1 Jn 4:7-21) With regard to having a good personal relationship with God, it is also important to be humble, since "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble."(Jam 4:6 RSV) God reveals himself to those who have an open humble attitude like a small child, rather than to those who proudly think they are wise or learned.(cf. Mt 11:25-27) In this regard the saints, those who have grown in the love of God and genuine humility to a remarkable degree, can teach us much about God. The Christian heritage, including the Bible, contains a wealth of material to help us to grow in knowing and loving God better. No matter how great we experience, imagine, conceive or describe God to be, however, God is always greater.<sup>8</sup>

## **2. Creation: Persons, Sex, Love and Marriage as Good Gifts**

With respect to the whole range of human experiences concerning man-woman relationships, human sexuality, love and marriage, there exists a mixture of good (desirable, positive, beneficial) and evil (undesirable, negative, harmful) elements. There also exist both the potential and the actualization of various degrees of abuse, hurt, disillusionment and tragedy on the one hand, and of respect, enjoyment, happiness, fulfillment and personal growth on the other hand. A Christian perspective holds that the mysteries of creation, sin and redemption, among others, throw great light

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8. Cf., e.g., "God" in both McKenzie and Léon-Dufour (see note 1); Thomas Aquinas, ST I,2-43; George Maloney, *Invaded by God: Mysticism and the Indwelling Trinity* (Denville, New Jersey: Dimension Books, 1979); Medard Kehl and Werner Loser, eds., *Hans Urs von Balthasar: The Von Balthasar Reader* (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 92-115; Marisa Cerini, *God Who is Love: in the Experience and Thought of Chiara Lubich* (New York: New City Press, 1992). For a recent synthesis of Catholic teaching on God see CCC, nn. 27-73 and 198-278.

on our understanding all of this.

According to the Jewish-Christian doctrine of creation, the one and only uncreated God originally created everything else "very good" (Gen 1:31 RSV) and out of nothing (cf. 2 Mac 7:22-23 and Rm 4:17). Also, if God did not continue to hold created beings in existence, they would cease to exist. God created not only the visible universe including human beings but also the invisible including angels, purely spiritual persons. He created not out of necessity or to increase his happiness, but freely, to communicate his love and goodness. The human person is a profound unity of body and spiritual soul. We are thus related to the material universe and part of the ecosystem, and capable of having a personal relationship with God, who is Spirit, and with other persons. Human experience also testifies to this. The doctrine of creation gives explicit response to basic questions people of all times have asked themselves concerning where do we come from and where are we going.<sup>9</sup>

Human beings, male and female, are created in the "image of God" (see Gen 1:26-27). We are both unlike and like God. We are not God and not exactly like God, since we are finite, contingent creatures, historical beings existing in a particular place and time, in a state of journeying, and have

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9. See CCC, nn. 279-384, for a concise synthesis of Catholic teaching on creation, as well as 1603-5 regarding marriage in the order of creation, 2201-6 regarding the family in God's plan, and 2231-6 regarding human sexuality as created by God. Regarding the Bible and theology, see, e.g., "Creation" in both McKenzie and Léon-Dufour (see note 1); Thomas Aquinas, ST I,44-49; Jordan Aumann, *Spiritual Theology* (Huntington: Our Sunday Visitor, 1980), 37-40; von Balthasar (see note 8), 57-92; and Flaman (see note 5), III.2 and IV.2. Regarding creation and the theory of evolution, we can note here that Pope Pius XII in *Humani Generis* (1950) taught that Catholic teaching leaves the theory of evolution "...an open question, as long as it confines its speculations to development, from other living matter already in existence, of the human body. (That souls are immediately created by God is a view which the Catholic faith imposes on us.)..."(TCT, 154, DS 3896) Cf. Pope John Paul II, "Message to Pontifical Academy of Sciences on Evolution," *Origins: CNS Documentary Service*, 5 Dec. 1996, 414-16. Catholic teaching and good theology intend to be open to the whole truth, including that revealed by God and the genuine findings of the human sciences.

limited experience and knowledge. We are like God in various ways. Compare our spiritual immortal soul including our spiritual powers of mind, heart and will, and the fact that we can only find true fulfillment in a communion of persons with mutual self-giving love in God. Our bodies "image" God in a certain sense too, since we communicate with our bodies, both verbally and nonverbally. We express, reveal and give ourselves as well as discover and receive the gift of the other with our bodies. We also image God in procreation, collaborating with God in creating new human persons, and in our stewardship of ourselves and the rest of the visible creation, that is, by participating in God's providence. Since all human beings, male and female, are created in the "image of God", all human life from its conception is sacred, and every human being has a great and equal fundamental dignity, regardless of differences in sex, attributes, virtues, age, and so forth.

Because everything that God created is "very good", the whole human person in all his or her dimensions is fundamentally good. This includes not only our intellectual, moral and spiritual dimensions, but also our biological, psychological and social dimensions. The body and sex in the case of human beings have personal dignity. Sex is not merely an attribute but is constitutive of the human person. Sexual differentiation and complementarity, which involve all the dimensions of human beings, are also very good as willed by God. Our bodies, male and female, and all their parts including our sexual organs and their being designed to generate (also to nourish in the case of the female) new human life, are good. Heterosexual intercourse and procreation manifest the complementarity of the sexes in a striking way. Created differences, including sexual differences, should be appreciated as mutually enriching, as contributing to the splendid variety, beauty and order of God's marvelous creation.

With regard to the structure and language of the human body, male and female, and of



heterosexual intercourse, becoming "one flesh" in marriage (cf. Gen 2:23-25), Pope John Paul II has spoken profoundly and eloquently of the "nuptial meaning" of the human body.<sup>10</sup> To fully appreciate this meaning one needs to participate in the Creator's vision of the "pure" value of the body and sex. God, motivated by love, has given man and woman as gifts "for" each other. The human body and sex are raised to the level of the person and the communion of persons - the "image of God". The human body with its sex is not only a source of fruitfulness (cf. its "generative meaning"), but includes the capacity of expressing love, in which the person becomes a gift and fulfills the meaning of his or her being and existence. Mastery of self (self-control) is indispensable for one (man or woman) to be able to sincerely give oneself and so fully discover one's true self.<sup>11</sup> Grace, participating in the interior life and holiness of God, a gift to the human heart, enables the disinterested giving of oneself. Mutual self-donation, giving oneself in love, and accepting, receiving and welcoming the gift of the other creates the communion of persons. The "nuptial" meaning of the body, that is, giving oneself in love, is also connected with happiness. Pope John Paul II affirms that not only the bodies of a man and woman who freely choose to give themselves to each other in marriage possess a full "nuptial" meaning, but also the body of a man or woman who freely makes a gift of himself or herself for the kingdom of heaven (cf. Christian celibacy).

According to a Christian perspective, marriage is not merely a social institution, but is instituted or established by God. Marriage corresponds to the nature of man and woman as created by God.

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10. See especially a number of Pope John Paul II's General Audiences from Sept. 5, 1979, to April 2, 1980, *Original Unity of Man and Woman* (see note 1). In this whole section, I have incorporated, in particular, some of the insights of John Paul II, as well as Dietrich von Hildebrand - see his *Man and Woman* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1966) and *Marriage: Mystery of Faithful Love* (Manchester, New Hampshire: Sophia Institute Press, 1984).

11. Cf. the Second Vatican Council, GS, n. 24.

Marriage, a reciprocal personal covenant, by means of which a man and a woman freely and solemnly consent before God to give themselves to each other and to accept each other for life, without reservation, corresponds to the "nuptial" meaning of the body. By their marriage covenant the man and woman have chosen each other as the only "friend" with whom one is to "become one flesh", as the only one to live with in this way for life. They have given themselves a new identity, as "husband" and "wife". They belong to each other (not as impersonal property but as personal subjects who have given themselves to each other) and are no longer single people. Sexual relations which involve a total reciprocal giving and receiving on the bodily level naturally express or symbolize a total personal reciprocal giving and receiving. Sexual relations can thus only be really honest or truthful, and correspond to the language and truth of the body, in marriage. As designed by God, sexual relations are meant to be a renewal of the marriage covenant. When a husband and wife have sexual relations with each other, they are fulfilling their "word" to each other.<sup>12</sup>

By becoming "one flesh" in marriage, a man and woman give and reveal themselves and are "known" (cf. Gen 4:1) in a unique way. While two different personal subjects, in unity they almost become one subject of the conjugal act. In conjugal union, each is "given" to the other and known as a unique unrepeatable subject or person. They discover in a new definitive way the meaning of their human bodies as male and female. In the conjugal act they also submit themselves to the possibility of procreation. By becoming a mother and a father, they come to know themselves and

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12. Cf. Pope John Paul II, FC, n. 11; and William E. May, *Sex, Marriage, and Chastity: Reflections of a Catholic Layman, Spouse, and Parent* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1981), Ch. 3. Paul Quay in *The Christian Meaning of Human Sexuality* (Evanston, IL: Credo House Books, 1985) articulates the symbolic meaning of human sexuality in considerable detail. John Kippley in *Sex and the Marriage Covenant: A Basis for Morality* (Cincinnati: The Couple to Couple League International, Inc., 1991) develops a theology of human sexuality, marriage and sexual ethics in the light of the personal marriage covenant.

each other, their femininity and masculinity, the meaning of their bodies, in a fuller way. They also know each other in the "third" person sprung from them both. The child represents a permanent sign of their conjugal union. Human procreation has a great dignity, since it involves a man and woman freely giving themselves to each other and receiving the gift of another person. It involves collaborating with God, who directly creates the spiritual soul, in creating a new human being in the "image of God". The child is not their property, but has a personal dignity equal to theirs. Marriage corresponds to the personal values involved in the procreation and education of human children. It is the best "place" for the needs of the child to be met, including his or her need for unconditional, total self-giving and faithful love from both parents in unity. The conjugal act is a unique kind of "touch" because, by God's design, it is naturally connected to giving life to a new human being, and the total reciprocal physical giving and receiving naturally signifies a total unreserved reciprocal giving and receiving of the man and woman to each other in marriage.<sup>13</sup>

Conjugal love, the love between a husband and wife, according to the plan of the Creator, is meant to be total, faithful, exclusive and fruitful. As total it involves a man and a woman in all the dimensions of their persons. Related to their biological dimension it involves hormones, physical sexual attraction, and so forth; related to their psychological dimension it involves their emotions, feelings, affectivity, imagination, memory, perception, and an attraction regarding their masculinity and femininity which goes beyond the physical and includes their whole personalities; regarding their moral dimension (regarding free will, choice and responsibility) it involves wanting and acting for the good of each other, caring, the closest of human friendships, and freely giving themselves to each other and receiving the gift of the other in gratitude; and regarding their spiritual dimension

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13. Cf. Pope John Paul II (see notes 10 and 12); and May (see note 12).

it involves participating in God's love for each other. The various dimensions of human beings and various aspects of holistic conjugal love do not exist in isolation from each other. They are meant to be in an integrated harmonious order.<sup>14</sup>

Mutual love both inclines to union and is a power for union. A man and a woman who love each other in a complete way want to belong to each other in an entirely exclusive manner. Monogamous marriage fulfills such love and corresponds to their equal personal dignity. Marital fidelity, including sexual fidelity, is required by the nature of conjugal love and marriage. Marriage, the most intimate of earthly I-thou, face-to-face personal relationships, involves not only living "with" but "for" the beloved. Spousal love aims at a full irrevocable self-donation, at indissoluble union in the sacred bond of marriage. Marriage is a freely and reciprocally chosen irrevocable covenant, a partnership for the whole of life. The conjugal union implies such a radical surrender, intimacy and exclusiveness that it can not be repeated with another person while the other is alive. While marital fidelity is sometimes difficult, it is always possible because of the absolutely faithful love of God for each person. Marital fidelity contributes to the good of spouses and their children. Spouses are called to foster their fidelity on a daily basis by caring and sharing, including communicating their inner "selves" with each other. Their fidelity gives special witness to God's faithful unconditional love.<sup>15</sup>

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14. Cf. the Second Vatican Council, GS, n. 49; Pope Paul VI, HV, nn. 8-9; and Fabio Giardini, *Principi di Morale Sessuale Cattolica* (Rome: Pontifical University of St. Thomas, 1980), Ch. 2. Regarding human love, Jordan Aumann distinguishes "physical love", "the emotion of love", and "volitional love". He also speaks of "the love that is charity", "marital love", and "celibate love" in "Part One: Theology of Love and Sexuality", in *The Unquiet Heart: Reflections on Love and Sexuality* (New York: Alba House, 1991), by Jordan Aumann, O.P., and Dr. Conrad Baars. Dr. Baars treats the psychology of love and sexuality in part two.

15. Cf. von Hildebrand (see note 10). John Gallagher relates fidelity to persons including marital fidelity to appreciating the other as a personal subject, God and *agape* love, in "Fidelity,

The conjugal act is a special way of expressing marital love and fostering the unity of the spouses. It is, however, not the only way. It is vitally important that spouses also foster their conjugal love in many other ways: other affectionate gestures, words and acts of kindness, thoughtfulness, service, forgiveness, sacrificing mere preferences and wants when this is called for by their good and a properly ordered love, and so forth.<sup>16</sup>

True conjugal love is also fruitful. This fruitfulness normally includes the wonderful blessing of children - sharing the gift of life and love with others. It is not limited to procreation though. In educating their children, parents are called to share themselves and many things including moral and spiritual fruits. Physical sterility can be an opportunity to share life and love in other important ways such as by adopting children. All are called, too, to love others.<sup>17</sup>

In the light of the doctrine of creation, we can speak of a certain objective "hierarchy" of goods or values. In the visible universe, the human person is the only creature God created for itself.<sup>18</sup> While all of the visible universe is created good by God, human persons created in the "image of God" are more important than non-personal beings including animals. The human person as a whole is also more important than his or her attributes, including his or her sexual attributes, which may change over time. This also corresponds to unprejudiced experience of values including our intersubjective experience and our experience of ourselves as personal subjects. Our properly

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Permanence, and Growth in Marriage: Theological Reflections", in *Christian Marriage Today: Growth or Breakdown?: Interdisciplinary Essays*, ed. by Joseph Buijs (Toronto: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1985), 111-25.

16. Cf. May (see note 12), Ch. 3.

17. Cf. Pope John Paul II, FC, nn. 14 and 28; and Flaman (see note 5), Ch. IV.

18. The Second Vatican Council, GS, n. 24.

ordered love and stewardship of ourselves and non-personal beings includes properly respecting all that is good, an objective hierarchy of values, and God's purposes for human beings and the rest of his creation. A properly ordered love affirms the person as such and never uses her or him as a mere means, for example, by reducing her or him to a means to my happiness or pleasure. Such love responds to God's image in the other, appreciating the beauty of the special divine idea which this unique person embodies. Holistic love integrates the appreciation of everything else into loving and worshipping God, who is infinitely good and the ultimate source of all else that is good.<sup>19</sup>

Coming to a better awareness of the profound meaning of the doctrine of creation can help one to see and appreciate oneself and others, including our sexuality, in a more positive way. It can also help us to live in a more constructive and creative way. We are not here as mere products of blind forces or chance, but because the one and only infinitely good, personal and loving God freely chose to create us. We are God's dear children, brothers and sisters, sharing the same humanity. God is the wise and loving designer or author of our human nature, including our sexuality with its marital / unitive / love-giving and procreative / life-giving meanings,<sup>20</sup> and marriage and the family. They are God's ideas. Created in God's image we are called to mutual self-giving love, to a "communion

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19. Cf. Karol Wojtyla (Pope John Paul II), *Love and Responsibility* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, Inc., 1981), Chs. I-II; and von Hildebrand (see notes 7 and 10). Regarding the issue of what is good or valuable, Chs. I-IV of this book also contain much material from various perspectives, including outlines of a few fairly recent approaches by Christian ethicists (see Ch. I.A, second last paragraph).

20. We can note here that it is not only Catholic teaching and authors that speak of the unitive and procreative meanings of human sexuality. Cf., e.g., the German Lutheran theologian Helmut Thielicke, *The Ethics of Sex* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1964); and the Methodist Christian ethicist Paul Ramsey, *One Flesh: A Christian View of Sex Within, Outside and Before Marriage* (Bramcote, Notts.: Grove Books, 1975). Indeed, these meanings correspond to common human experience. The sexual organs and sexual intercourse are obviously designed for reproduction or procreation. Mature people also appreciate human sexual relations as a special expression of mutual love and unity.

of persons", in God. Each of us is called as well to see, appreciate and respect oneself and other created persons, including first of all one's spouse, children and friends, as well as nature and the whole universe, as good gifts or beautiful works of art of the Creator. The appropriate response on our part includes, among other things, expressing our gratitude and giving praise to God.

### **3. Sin: Its Negative Effects on Our Relationships**

From a Christian perspective, sin and its negative consequences should always be considered in relation to the mystery of the redemption (see section A.5 below, this chapter). God's redemption in Christ reveals a love that is more powerful than sin, an infinitely powerful love that is capable of overcoming all the negative consequences of sin superabundantly.

Sin is a failure to love God, people including oneself, and the rest of creation, in a properly ordered way. (Regarding whether or not premarital sex is a sin compare Chs. VI, VII and VIII.A-C). The Bible portrays the mystery of iniquity using various terms and images: idolatry, rebelling against or disobeying God and his will for us, infidelity or "adultery" regarding God and his covenant with us, lawlessness, being hard hearted, slavery, and so forth. Various theologians and Church teaching have made certain distinctions concerning sin: original sin (cf. Gn 3 and Rm 5:12-21), personal sins, "social" sin or sinful structures; mortal and venial sin (cf. 1 Jn 5:16-17); and material and formal sin.<sup>21</sup> Sin is primarily evil in a moral sense (i.e. a disorder regarding the will, a failure to love

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21. Regarding biblical treatments of sin, see e.g., "Sin" in both McKenzie and Léon-Dufour (see note 1); regarding later theological treatments of sin see, e.g., Thomas Aquinas, ST I-II, 71-89; Piet Schoonenberg, *Man and Sin: A Theological View* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1965); and Germain Grisez, *The Way of the Lord Jesus*, vol. 1, *Christian Moral Principles* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1983), Chs. 13-18 (cf. also the many references to other works). Although one may not agree with all of Grisez's proposals (e.g. regarding polygenism), the significant contribution to moral philosophy and theology of Grisez and his collaborators should certainly be acknowledged. For a recent synthesis of Catholic teaching on sin, see CCC, nn. 385-421, 1606-8 (regarding marriage under the regime of sin), 1846-76, and 2351-9 and 2380-91 (regarding offenses against chastity and the dignity of marriage).

properly, choosing to act irresponsibly). Nevertheless, it causes harm or disorder on other levels including the spiritual, psychological, social, economic, and even the physical level.<sup>22</sup> For example, if parents and others fail to love and responsibly meet the real needs of children, the children can be harmed spiritually, psychologically, socially, and physically. Those who fail to love and act responsibly, especially when done with awareness and deliberately, also harm their own moral integrity. Since God is infinitely good and loves perfectly, he does not will that anyone sin. He does, however, respect the gift of freedom he has given us, and so allows human beings to sin, as well as the disorder and various evils that are the natural consequences of sin.

We could name many evils (undesirable, harmful or negative behaviors or aspects of persons or things) with respect to all areas of human life. With respect to the areas of sex and marriage consider, for example, various forms of sexual abuse, mental cruelty, violence, pride, selfishness, infidelity, dishonesty, possessiveness, indifference, marital and family disorganization,<sup>23</sup> and sexually transmitted diseases. What is negative or "evil" about these? Augustine and Aquinas, wishing to be faithful to the teaching that God created everything good (cf. Gen 1), understood evil respectively as sin or a consequence of sin, and as privation, a lack of good (order, love, integrity, proper fullness of being) that should be there. Along similar lines, many contemporaries use terms such as "depersonalizing" or "dehumanizing".<sup>24</sup> Consider, for example, prostitution and

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22. Cf. the Second Vatican Council, GS, 13 and 25.

23. I have treated sin and temptation with respect to marital and family disorganization in *Family Unity* (see note 5), Ch. II.

24. For an overview of various views on evil, see, e.g., R. Jolivet, "Evil", NCE, vol. 5.



pornography.<sup>25</sup> Sex and human bodies are not evil per se. Rather, there is something "evil" or depersonalizing and dehumanizing about prostitution and pornography because of the lack of love and respect that should be there for persons. Human sexuality and the human body are reduced to commodities rather than appreciated in terms of their "nuptial" and "generative" meanings, mutual self-giving love in a true communion of persons. Human persons are reduced to sexual "objects" rather than fully respected as personal subjects.<sup>26</sup>

Sin, both original and personal, has various negative or alienating effects on our relationships with God, other persons, ourselves, and the rest of creation. Sin alienates us from God not only when we sin against God directly by deliberate contempt of God or rebellion against his will and plan. When we fail to love and respect properly persons, God's beloved children created in God's image, we also fail to love God properly. Personal values such as the great dignity of persons, human life, self-giving and faithful love, friendship, justice, procreation, and truth, as we noted above (sections A.1 and 2, this chapter) are rooted in who God is and pertain to our imaging God. Thus, in our choices and actions, when we fail to respect properly such values or goods, we also offend God (cf. Ps 51:4). We determine ourselves in ways contrary to being like God, who always loves persons, the truth, justice, and so on, unconditionally. If one sins mortally one cuts oneself

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25. Not only "hard core" pornography is depersonalizing. See, e.g., Judith Reisman, *"Soft Porn" Plays Hardball: Its Tragic Effects on Women, Children and the Family* (Lafayette, Louisiana: Huntington House Publishers, 1991).

26. Cf. a number of Pope John Paul II's General Audiences from Apr. 16 to Dec. 3, 1980, regarding "lust", *Blessed are the Pure of Heart* (Boston: St. Paul Editions, 1983). In *Toward a Growing Marriage* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1979), 18-19, Gary Chapman, a Baptist pastor, shares the experience of a friend who first looked at young women on the French Riviera from his apartment window lustfully, as "sex objects". Later, following the advice of a friend, he went down to the beach and talked with them. He discovered that they were persons not things. Each had her own unique personality, history, and dreams. They were persons with whom he could communicate and who could also relate to him as a person.

off from friendship and union with God, one excludes oneself from God's kingdom of love, truth, and justice (cf. Gal 5:19-21). Catholic teaching holds that God will forgive all sin, and our friendship with him can be restored, if we cooperate with his initiative and grace, and repent in this life.(cf. CCC, nn. 1846-64; and sections A.5 and B below)

When we fail to love and respect other persons properly we alienate ourselves from them. The communion of persons is harmed or destroyed. Concerning the whole man-woman relationship, the relationship of mutual self-giving and receiving love is transformed into a relationship of unilateral or mutual selfish appropriation or exploitation. In lust, for instance, people are treated or "used" as mere means to the satisfaction of sexual desire.<sup>27</sup> Concerning various sins that harm the man-woman interpersonal relationship consider also pride, domination, manipulation, envy, greed, lying, infidelity, hatred, revenge, slander, gossip, various forms of abuse, and so forth. Such sins have negative effects such as shame, division and the breakdown of trust. One's sins can hurt or wound others deeply.<sup>28</sup> Since social structures and cultures have resulted from personal actions in the past and continue to be molded by people's actions in the present, sinful social structures and sinful elements of cultures are the result of personal sins.<sup>29</sup>

Sin, however, harms the sinner first of all. When one deliberately chooses in ways that fail to love and respect properly God; the personal dignity of other persons and oneself; other personal

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27. Cf. Pope John Paul II, *ibid.*

28. Many of a person's psychological "wounds" or shortcomings are the result of the failures of others including parents to love one properly. The Catholic Church continues to teach that because of original sin, the sin of our first human parents, human nature is wounded both spiritually and corporally, inclined to sin but not totally corrupted, and is transmitted in a "fallen" state.(cf. CCC, nn. 396-409).

29. Cf. CCC, nn. 408 and 1869.

values such as self-giving and faithful love, justice, truth, human life and health, procreation, and friendship; and even the intrinsic goodness of non-personal beings, one harms one's own integrity as a person. One determines oneself or character in certain unloving, unjust, dishonest, anti-life and/or other ways. Such deliberate choices endure unless we repent of them. Repeated bad choices result in bad habits or vices. One can lose appreciation or even become blind to what is intrinsically good or valuable in itself, as well as to what is important in terms of integral human fulfillment and happiness. It becomes easier to justify and commit even greater sins and harder to love the good in a properly ordered way. Sin is addictive in a sense. One can become a slave to certain disordered desires or passions and more and more divided within or alienated from one's self as created in God's image. The Bible also presents the death of persons, in both spiritual (i.e. loss of communion with God's life) and bodily terms, as the result of sin (cf. Gn 3 and Rm 5:12-21). Catholic teaching affirms that if human beings had never sinned, God would have kept us immune from death including death of the body.<sup>30</sup>

Finally, alienation or disorder in our relationship with the rest of the created order has been caused by human sin, both original sin and subsequent personal sins. When instead of a loving, wise and creative stewardship, that respects properly God's purposes for things and their created goodness, we greedily exploit and manipulate "nature" in short-sighted and destructive ways, we lose harmony with our environment. Compare the ecological crisis which threatens many species of life, including the very existence of the human race on our planet.<sup>31</sup>

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30. Cf. the Second Vatican Council, GS, n. 18.

31. Cf. e.g., Jurgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: An Ecological Doctrine of Creation* (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1985), Ch. II "In the Ecological Crisis"; and Pope John Paul II, *The Ecological Crisis: A Common Responsibility* (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 8 Dec. 1989).

In this section, it also seems appropriate to say something about material and formal sin, and temptation. The distinction between material and formal sin concerns whether we consider an evil action objectively or subjectively.<sup>32</sup> An act is a material sin (i.e. the raw material for sin exists) if it is objectively morally evil, that is, it objectively violates God's will and human dignity, whether or not the person is aware of this. The act in question may be one of commission or omission, performed outwardly (e.g. adultery) or merely interiorly (e.g. adultery committed in the heart - see Mt 5:27-28). One sins formally when one chooses to act against one's own conscience. That is, one is aware or considers that the act is wrong and one freely chooses to perform the act anyway (or freely chooses not to do what one judges one should do). Formal sin presupposes moral awareness and freedom. It concerns the whole question of culpability. The imputability of a person doing an immoral act can be mitigated or even eliminated if one's moral awareness and/or freedom is weakened or non-existent, through no fault of one's own. Various factors such as unintentional ignorance, the promptings of feelings and passions, external pressures and/or pathological disorders can diminish or even remove proper moral awareness and voluntariness.<sup>33</sup> This pertains to all areas of morality including the whole area of sexual sins.

The distinction of material and formal sin is relevant with regard to forming one's conscience correctly and correcting others. A person who sins formally, other things being equal, harms one's own moral integrity and relationship with God more than if one only sins materially. Since material sin is objectively contrary to God's will and the dignity of persons, it also harms persons and the

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32. Cf. I. McGuiness, "Sin (Theology of)", NCE, vol. 13, 241; and Lk 12:47-48. Many people make this kind of distinction regarding evil actions whether or not they use the terms material and formal sin. Consider, e.g., the distinction between manslaughter and first degree murder.

33. Cf. CCC, n. 1860 (nn. 1762-75 treat the morality of the passions, emotions and feelings); and Grisez (see note 21), Ch. 17.

communion of persons. It too has negative effects on our various relationships. We, therefore, should try our best to form our consciences correctly and try to avoid all sin, formal and material. At times, a properly ordered love can lead us to correct others (e.g. parents have a responsibility to teach their children in their care what is objectively right and wrong; cf. also Mt 18:15-17). We should not attempt, however, to judge how another person stands before God (cf. Mt 7:1-5), since we cannot know the depths of another (cf. 1 Cor 2:10-11). Only God knows a person's background, mind and heart completely, how aware and how free any of us really is, and he will judge each of us fairly.

With regard to the question of temptation, there is a significant difference between being tempted to sin, something that happens to one, and actually sinning, something one does or fails to do. According to Christian teaching, Jesus was tempted to sin in all ways that we are (thus also in the sexual area), but did not sin (cf. Heb 4:15). Temptation is an enticement or inducement to sin that comes from outside oneself (e.g. another person's bad example or suggestion, or a sinful social structure) or from within (e.g. disordered desires, feelings and/or thinking). Fallen angels or devils can also be involved in human temptation. As an illustration of this consider the difference between natural sexual desire, being tempted to lust and committing the sin of lust. God, the author of sex, created us with natural sexual desires and so these in themselves are not bad but good. They are meant to serve the communion of persons. Because of sin and its effects, however, one can be tempted to lust. That is, one can be inclined to treat another person (perhaps only in one's mind and heart) as a sexual "object", merely as a "means" to satisfy sexual desire rather than fully respecting her or his dignity as a child of God, created in his image. We should resist temptation as Jesus did (cf. Mt 4:1-11; Mk 1:12-13; Lk 4:1-13), with the help of God. One commits the sin of lust when one

freely consents to a temptation of lust. A person can sin lustfully not only by certain external actions (e.g. adultery), but also by certain interior actions. Compare Jesus' teaching that a man who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart (see Mt 5:27-28).<sup>34</sup> With respect to temptation, not only in the sexual area, it is important to believe and hope that God will enable us to overcome all temptations if we fully entrust ourselves to him. With God all things are possible.(cf. 1 Cor 10:13; and Lk 1:37)

As a transition between this section and the rest of this chapter, let us note that according to a Christian perspective, the all-loving and all-powerful God offers us through Jesus Christ the "good news" of redemption or liberation from sin and all of its negative effects.

#### **4. Incarnation: Jesus as Our Best Friend and Beloved**

The incarnation is the mystery of the eternal Word of God becoming flesh and living among us in Jesus Christ (cf. Jn 1:1-18), motivated by love, to save us (cf. Jn 3:16-17). The eternal Word or Son of God is the second divine Person of the most Holy Trinity. The incarnation had a beginning in time, when Mary conceived Jesus in her womb by the power of the Holy Spirit (cf. Lk 1:26-38). In Jesus the fullness of divinity and humanity are deeply united forever. As true God, Jesus fully reveals to us God and his plan for us. As true man, Jesus fully reveals to us who we are and who we are called to become. As God Jesus embodies all the divine attributes (cf. section A.1 above). As a human being Jesus has a human body and soul, with human ways of knowing and

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34. Pope John Paul II, in a number of General Audiences from Apr. 16 to Dec. 3, 1980 (see note 26), has analyzed this text in considerable depth. Among other things, he says that we often understand the words of Jesus in Mt 5:27-28 as a prohibition without trying to reveal the deep values this prohibition covers, protects, makes accessible and liberates. Christ's teaching indirectly calls us to a "full and mature spontaneity" regarding man-woman relations, to rediscover "the spiritual beauty of the sign constituted by the human body in its masculinity and femininity" (General Audiences of Nov. 5 and 12, 1980). Cf. also Philip Keane regarding sexual imagination in *Christian Ethics and Imagination* (New York: Paulist Press, 1984), 161-4.

feeling, and a human will.

...by his incarnation, he, the Son of God, has in a certain way united himself with each man. He worked with human hands, he thought with a human mind. He acted with a human will, and with a human heart he loved. Born of the Virgin Mary, he has truly been made one of us, like to us in all things except sin.(cf. Heb 4:15)<sup>35</sup>

God has truly shown his solidarity with us in the incarnation, by means of which he also willed to share in "human fellowship" and sanctify "human ties, above all family ties, which are the basis of social structures."(GS, n. 32 Flannery) Jesus experienced and dignified the various stages of human life: conception, gestation, birth, infancy, childhood, adolescence, adulthood and death. His resurrection and glorious ascension confirm his divinity, the truth of his message, and are signs of hope of what awaits those who love God. In his life on earth, however, Jesus did not only experience good things. He also experienced hunger, thirst, weakness, and was tempted in every way that we are.(cf. Heb 4:15) Thus Jesus experienced temptations of pride, of lust as a young unmarried man, of taking the easy way out rather than being responsible and faithful to God's will, and so forth. Jesus experienced the various forms of human suffering: rejection, physical abuse (cf. his scourging, crowning of thorns and crucifixion), being misunderstood, being betrayed by close

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35. The Second Vatican Council, GS, n. 22 (Flannery); cf. also DV, n. 6. For a recent synthesis of Catholic teaching on the incarnation see CCC, nn. 422-682. Regarding the Bible, see, e.g., "Jesus Christ", in both McKenzie and Léon-Dufour (see note 1); and regarding theological studies on the incarnation see, e.g., Thomas Aquinas, ST III,1-26; Louis Bouyer, *The Eternal Son: A Theology of the Word of God and Christology* (Huntington, Indiana: Our Sunday Visitor, Inc. 1978); and von Balthasar (see note 8), 115-204. We can also note here that while some extreme feminists have left Christianity because of its "male" Savior, Jesus Christ, many other women have found the fact that Jesus is a male human being liberating. Many women who have had some bad experiences in their relationships with men (fathers, husbands, boyfriends...), have experienced being loved perfectly by Jesus. This has resulted in healing of themselves and their relationships, including those with men. Cf. a sharing by theologian Sr. Donna Geernaert at a meeting of the Canadian Theological Society a few years ago that I attended; and Chervin (see note 2).

associates or friends (e.g. Judas and Peter), as well as other forms. During his crucifixion, he even felt abandoned by God.(cf. Mt 27:46; par.) We can therefore appreciate that Jesus (and thus also God) really understands what it is like to be human, including being a sexual being in relationships with other human persons, male and female.

Being without sin and perfectly embodying the love of God, Jesus, as a perfect human being, also embodies most perfectly all genuine human, personal and Christian values including self-giving and faithful love, justice, mercy, compassion, tenderness, truth, human and divine life, personal integrity, service, and so on. He also exemplifies most perfectly all Christian virtues including, among others, charity, humility, obedience, honesty, kindness, generosity, justice, courage, gentleness, prudence, self-control, chastity and purity. Jesus is our best model. Concerning this consider also Rm 8:28 (NJB): "We are well aware that God works with those who love him, those who have been called in accordance with his purpose, and turns everything to their good." This is a very encouraging and hopeful message. Jesus loved God who worked everything, not only the good things that Jesus experienced but also the bad, for good according to his plan. If we, too, love God, he, who is infinitely powerful, loving and wise, is able to and will work out everything in our lives for the best. "Everything" includes both our good and bad experiences, and in our case (but not in Jesus' case) also our mistakes and sins. The important condition, that we love God, means that we need to repent of our sins, among other things. (See section A.5 and B below regarding the redemption and the Christian vocation.)

Paul Quay, S.J., speaks of Jesus Christ as:

...the norm for all that we do, think, or hope to be. It is Christ who sets all the questions and problems, contexts and answers; not we; not our sciences. The material universe was created through Him and



for Him. He has come into it that He might bring it, in perfection and fulfillment, to the Father, even though, through sin, it had been delivered to slavery and death. For He loves all that he has made; and at the heart of the universe is the Heart of Christ.

If, then, we are to understand that part of the universe that is ourselves, and that aspect of ourselves that is our sexuality, we can do so only if we go to Christ....<sup>36</sup>

As true God and true man, Jesus is our Lord and Savior, the Messiah or Christ, the perfect Mediator (one who goes between, reconciles) between God and human beings, the Way, the Truth and the Life, the supreme high priest who continually intercedes before God for us (see, e.g., 1 Tm 2:5; Jn 14:6; and Heb). It is also proper to relate to Jesus as our best friend and beloved or spouse, whether we are unmarried or married to another human being. At the last supper, according to the Gospel of John, Jesus addressed his disciples as his friends:

This is my commandment: love one another, as I have loved you. No one can have greater love than to lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends, if you do what I command you. I shall no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business; I call you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have learnt from my Father. (Jn 15:12-15 NJB)

Throughout his life on earth, in particular in his suffering and death, Jesus laid down his life for his "friends" in self-giving sacrificial love. The risen Jesus, as well as the Father and Holy Spirit, comes to abide with and reveals himself to those who love him and keep his commandments (cf.

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36. Paul Quay (see note 12), 10. He speaks of looking not only at Jesus, the new Adam, but also at Mary, the new Eve, in her measure. "In these two alone God's will for the human nature that He created can be seen whole and integral." (9) Catholic teaching, in harmony with Scripture and Tradition, holds that Mary by a special divine privilege was kept free from both original and personal sin. Mary, as a human being and not God, was redeemed from sin by Christ in a unique way. For a concise recent synthesis of Catholic teaching on Mary, including her sinlessness and unique role in God's plan as mother of Christ, see CCC, nn. 484-511 and 963-75, as well as the index. Of interest the feminist theologian Mary Aquin O'Neill (see note 2), 152, says that "in the figure of Mary, Christians are given the redeeming image of God in female being, an image that is salvific for men as well as for women."

Jn 14:15-24; and section B below). Jesus is present to us and makes himself better known to us by various means and in various ways: the Scriptures; the sacraments and liturgy of his Church, of which he is the principal minister; his ministers; prayer, individually or with others, and good spiritual reading; and in oneself, others and our relationships - provided we approach all of these with proper dispositions, open to encountering Jesus in them. Jesus promised to be in the midst of those who meet in his name (cf. Mt 18:20), that is, in our relationships if we love one another as he loves us, whether we are praying or doing other things in accord with God's will.<sup>37</sup> We can encounter Jesus and express our love for him by truly loving other persons, including those we consider "least", by responding to their real needs (cf. Mt 25:31-46).

Jesus invites us to relate to him as our "best friend". He is always available for us to share everything with him, including all of our concerns, problems, dreams, hopes, goals, and blessings for which we owe him gratitude (e.g., those regarding relationships, school, dating, sex, career, marriage, children). He is always present to listen, help and guide us. Better than any other human being including oneself, Jesus loves us with perfect fidelity. He knows and understands us perfectly and what is best for us, and he only wants what is best for us as persons and in all of our relationships.

Jesus is referred to in the Gospels as the Beloved, the Bridegroom, and as having a beloved disciple (see Mt 3:17 and 9:15; Mk 1:11; Lk 3:22; Jn 3:29 and 19:26-27). Elsewhere in the Bible, God's relationship with his people, and Christ's relationship with the Church, his Bride, are compared to marriage (see, e.g., Hos 2:18; Eph 5:21-33). God is closer to us and loves us infinitely

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37. Cf. the Second Vatican Council (Vat.II), "Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy" *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, n. 7; and *United in his Name: Jesus in Our Midst in the experience and thought of Chiara Lubich* (New York: New City Press, 1992), by Judith Povilus.

more than anyone else can or does, including the best of human beloveds or spouses. In Jesus, God offers us the fullness of inner life and joy. In the light of all this, as well as the experience of many Christians of the past and present, we can understand that God in Jesus wants to have a very intimate personal relationship with each of us, as his "beloved spouse". Indeed, the highest grade of prayer or the highest degree of the perfection of Christian love that one can attain in this life is often referred to as the "transforming union" in love or "spiritual marriage" with God. The Second Vatican Council, LG, Ch. 5, teaches that Jesus calls every one of his disciples to the perfection of love (cf. Mt 5:48). Concerning this universal call of Jesus to holiness, Jordan Aumann, O.P., says, "The Christian life, if it is developed according to the supernatural powers that are inherent in it, will lead to the transforming union of charity, which is in turn the prelude to the beatific vision."<sup>38</sup>

As a bridge between this section and the next, we can note that the whole perspective of the teaching and mission of Jesus Christ, of the whole Gospel, is that of the redemption.<sup>39</sup>

### **5. Redemption: Reconciliation, Healing and New Life**

The term redemption, in a Christian theological sense and as used here, means liberation from sin and all the negative consequences of sin including death. It also refers to the gift of new life and all that God wants for us in Jesus Christ, including what is meant by the theological terms justification and sanctification. Various other terms and analogies such as salvation, healing, liberation, empowerment, reconciliation, and so forth, have been used to help us understand God's

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38. Aumann (see note 9), 354. In Ch. 12 he treats "Grades of Prayer", including the "transforming union" or "spiritual marriage", referring in particular to the writings of Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross. We can also note here that Pope Leo XIII in his Encyclical *Octobri Mense* (1891) said that by means of the incarnation the eternal Son of God willed "...to enter into a sort of mystical marriage with the entire human race..." (TCT, 209; DS 3274). Cf. also CCC, n. 796.

39. Cf. Pope John Paul II, General Audience of Dec. 3, 1980 (see note 26), 192.

plan concerning all of this. According to the Christian vision, God wants all people to be saved, that is, from all sin and evil, and his will for us is our sanctification, that is, our growing in holiness, our perfection in his love (cf. 1 Tm 2:4 and 1 Th 4:3). From a Christian perspective, the mystery of the redemption has been accomplished through the Paschal mystery - the suffering, death, resurrection and glorious ascension of Jesus Christ - although it remains to be fully realized in us. This realization is being accomplished by God's Holy Spirit, sent by the Father and Jesus, and will only be completely fulfilled with the Second Coming of Christ, the general resurrection of the dead, the last judgment, and the establishment of the new heavens and earth.<sup>40</sup>

### **Healing Our Relationships**

In section A.3 above we focused on the negative effects of sin on our relationships. Here we focus on the corresponding and superabundant positive effects of the redemption on our relationships with God, ourselves, other persons, and the rest of creation. God's redeeming us in Jesus Christ demonstrates a love that is more powerful than sin, than divisions and various forms of alienation, more powerful even than death. Although sin offends God and alienates the sinner from God, in his infinite mercy God offers to forgive all our sins, all our failures to love in a properly ordered way, and to reconcile us completely with himself in Jesus. He offers us the grace to repent, to turn from our sins and our sinful attachments, to open ourselves to his redeeming love,

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40. Regarding the Bible see, e.g., "redemption", "salvation", "liberation, liberty" or "free, freedom", "justification" or "righteousness", "reconciliation", "love", "holy", "Spirit" (of God), and "resurrection" in Léon-Dufour and McKenzie (see note 1). For a recent synthesis of Catholic teaching on the redemption (and related topics such as the Church and resurrection) see CCC, nn. 571-1065 and 1987-2029. Cf. also Pope John Paul II's first Encyclical *Redemptor Hominis* (Vatican City: Vatican Polyglot Press, 1979). For a few theological treatments, see, e.g., Thomas Aquinas, ST III,46-59 and 69-99 (Supp.); Marcel van Caster, *The Redemption: A Personalist View* (Glen Rock, NJ: Paulist Press, 1965); Grisez (see note 21), Chs. 19-25; and Flaman (see note 5), Ch. III.5-7.

to become his intimate friends and beloved spouse, and to share in his life, love and happiness forever. In order for this to happen, we need to freely cooperate with God, confess our sins, continually choose his will in everything, and entrust ourselves to him, allowing him to make us more and more like himself, so that we can be fully united to him.(cf., e.g., 1 Jn 1:5-10 and 3:1-3; and Mt 7:21)

God's plan of redemption includes reconciling each person to himself or herself, healing all the wounds of the sins of oneself and others as these have affected the different dimensions of one's person. In recent years much has been written about Christian healing, including inner healing. Although some of these works lack a proper theological balance, God does want to heal each of us completely. We should thus ask God to heal us, in general and specifically, while respecting his timing and realizing that what is not healed in this life will be healed in the next, if we cooperate with God. Indeed, many people have experienced God's healing in various and remarkable ways.<sup>41</sup>

While sin can make us blind to what is really best for us and weakens our ability to love the good in a properly ordered way, God's salvation includes the Holy Spirit leading us to understand the complete truth and freeing or empowering us to love as God loves (cf. Jn 8:31-32, 14:6-27 and 16:7-15; and Rm 5:5). This includes enabling us to grow in properly loving (appreciating, respecting and promoting) various genuine goods or values including, among others: God's supreme goodness; the special dignity of every person created in his image (cf. also the sacredness of all human life, and the personal dignity of the human body, human sexuality, the language of the human body, male and female, including its "nuptial" meaning, and human procreation); truth, justice, friendship, self-

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41. See, e.g., Theodore Dobson, *Inner Healing: God's Great Assurance* (New York: Paulist Press, 1978); John and Paula Sandford, *The Transformation of the Inner Man* (Tulsa, OK: Victory House, Inc., 1982); and Matthew and Dennis Lynn, *Healing Life's Hurts: Healing Memories Through Five Stages of Forgiveness* (New York: Paulist Press, 1978).

giving and faithful love, marriage and celibacy according to God's plan; and the intrinsic goodness of non-personal creation. There is a certain continuity between God's creation and redemption in Christ.

God who is all-loving and all-powerful wants to and is able to empower each of us to understand and live according to his plan, also concerning human love, sex and marriage, whether or not we are married. This involves freeing each of us so that we can love other persons for their own sake, so we can sincerely give ourselves in love and receive the gift of others and God in gratitude, so that we can find true fulfillment. God enables the person who freely cooperates with his grace to grow in all the Christian virtues. This includes the self-control that love requires (cf., e.g., the virtues of chastity and purity), so that we can more and more experience personal integrity - harmony or unity within, including a proper unity of mind, heart, will and body. Asking for and receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit, including his various gifts and fruits, is also important concerning this. We, including our bodies, are to become "temples" of God's indwelling Spirit. God wants to transform each of us into a new man or a new woman in Christ. God's grace does not destroy what is beautiful in human love and in each of our unique personalities. Rather, his grace frees us from sin (pride, selfishness, lust, etc.), makes each of us more beautiful, and enables us to reflect God's glory in a more luminous and splendid way.<sup>42</sup>

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42. Regarding the virtues, the gift of the Holy Spirit, and his gifts and fruits, cf., e.g., 1 Cor 13:13; Wis 8:7; Lk 11:13; Is 11:1-3; 1 Cor 6:19-20; Gal 5:22-23; CCC, nn. 687-747 and 1803-45; ST I-II,55-70 and II-II,1-170; Aumann, *Spiritual Theology* (see note 9), Chs. 4, 10 and 11; and Yves Congar's major theological study, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, 3 vols. (New York: The Seabury Press, 1983). Regarding the gift of the Holy Spirit and our transformation in Christ cf. also the Church, including her sacraments and liturgy, and prayer as means of Christ's saving grace. See, e.g., CCC, nn. 748-987, and Parts Two and Four; Aumann, Ch. 9, 12 and 13; Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Church in the New Testament* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1965); Jacques Maritain, *On the Church of Christ: The Person of the Church and Her Personnel* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1973); Nicholas Halligan, *The Ministry of the Celebration of the Sacraments*, 3 vols.

If we cooperate with God's love, this healing of oneself will be completed when not only one's soul, but also one's body, transfigured after the pattern of the glorious body of the risen Jesus, shares in eternal life forever (cf. Rm 8:23 regarding the redemption of our bodies; 1 Cor 15 regarding the resurrection of the dead; and Phil 3:21). Even though there will not be marriage (cf. Mt 22:24-30; Mk 12:18-27; Lk 20:27-40) and procreation in the next life, Christian faith in the resurrection confirms the perennial value and dignity of the human body, human sexuality and the "nuptial" meaning of the body.<sup>43</sup>

God's plan of redemption includes the healing of our relationships with other persons, male and female, too. God, who loves all human beings as his beloved children, wants to and is able to reconcile us among ourselves, overcoming any hostility, discord, divisions and barriers (cf. Eph

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(New York: Alba House, 1973 and 1974); and Dietrich von Hildebrand, *Liturgy and Personality* (Manchester, New Hampshire: Sophia Institute Press, 1986). For a theology of grace, see, e.g., Justin Hennessey, O.P., *Grace* (Rome: Pontificia Universitas a S. Thoma, 1977). Regarding the sacraments, among other things, we can note that baptism incorporates one into Christ, in confirmation one is conformed more closely to Christ and strengthened to grow in living as a disciple of Christ by the Holy Spirit, in penance and reconciliation (sacramental confession) one can receive absolution in Christ's name of one's sins committed after baptism and grace to help one from falling into sin again, and in the Eucharist, consecrated by a validly ordained priest, Jesus Christ is present in the fullness of his divinity and humanity, to heal and transform us, and to give us a peace that surpasses our understanding. It is recommended that Catholics, having proper dispositions, receive the Eucharist frequently, even daily, if their state in life permits this (cf. LG, n. 42). We will consider the sacrament of matrimony below in this section.

43. Regarding Christian self-control and purity, and the redemption and resurrection of the body, see, e.g., Pope John Paul II, a number of his General Audiences from Oct. 15, 1980 to Jul. 4, 1984, *Blessed are the Pure of Heart* and *The Theology of Marriage and Celibacy* (Boston: St. Paul Editions, 1983 and 1986 respectively). Of interest, Pope Pius XII taught that although death of a spouse ends marriage on the "juridical level and on that of the sensible reality", the "soul" of marriage, "conjugal love" survives. The "bonds of human and supernatural love contracted with matrimony" can be perfected and reinforced after death: Discourse on Sept. 16, 1957, "Insegnamenti Pontifici", vol. I, *Il Matrimonio* (Rome: Edizioni Paoline, 2nd ed. 1965), 466-8. The translation from the Italian is mine. Those who experienced genuine bonds of love on earth and remain faithful to God will experience a much greater unity and communion in heaven, because God will have perfected their love.

3:12-16; and GS, n. 22), including barriers to loving communication, if we allow him. The healing of interpersonal relationships, including man-woman relationships, is related to the healing of the individuals involved. The more we are healed and become like God and united to him, the more we will experience true communion and unity with each other. This includes: growing in respecting the personal dignity of each other and other values which are important for interpersonal communion; growing in God's grace and the Christian virtues (faith, hope, love, prudence, justice, fortitude, temperance, truthfulness, fidelity, generosity, humility, and all the others), and the gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit (wisdom, understanding, counsel, piety, fear of the Lord, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, trustfulness, gentleness, self-control, etc.); forgiving one another as Christ forgives us when we fail; and so forth.<sup>44</sup>

In short, people who grow together in loving one another as Jesus loves us, will more and more come to experience the profound unity for which Jesus prayed. This is a unity that is like and participates in the unity of the divine persons in God.(cf. Jn 17:20-22) With regard to the role of the Holy Spirit, we should also pray for the various "charisms" and try to exercise them in a proper and ordered way to build up and unify the people of God, the Church, the mystical body of Christ (cf., e.g., Rm 12:6-8; 1 Cor 12:4 to 14:40; Eph 4:7-13).<sup>45</sup>

Many people, both married and unmarried, have already experienced much healing in their interpersonal relationships. God wants to do much more and will do much more, if we ask him and cooperate with him. Again, this healing of relationships will only be fully completed in the next

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44. Cf. the sources referred to in note 42 above.

45. Cf., e.g., Chiara Lubich, *That all Men be One: Origins and Life of the Focolare Movement* (New York: New City Press, 1977); and the Canadian Bishops' message on the *Charismatic Renewal* (Ottawa: CCCB, 1975); and CCC, nn. 799-801.



life. There, those who have been open to God's omnipotent love will not only enjoy perfect "face-to-face" communion with the divine persons of the triune God. They will also enjoy perfect communion and unity with each other. With respect to this we can consider not only the Church's teaching on "heaven" or "everlasting life", based on Scripture and Tradition, but also her teaching and experience regarding the already existing "communion of saints" between heaven and earth.<sup>46</sup>

### **The Sacrament of Matrimony**

With respect to the healing of conjugal love and the man-woman relationship in marriage, the Christian sacrament of matrimony has special significance. This is part of the "Good News" of redemption in Christ. According to Catholic teaching, rooted in Scripture and Tradition, a valid marriage of a man and woman who have both received Christian baptism is one of the seven sacraments of the New Covenant of Christ and the Church.<sup>47</sup> By Christian Baptism one is immersed into the mystery of Christ and made a member of his mystical body or Church. The marriage of a man and woman who have both been baptized is thus "in the Lord".(cf. 1 Cor 7:39) Christ's

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46. Heavenly communion includes the angels who have remained faithful to God. In accord with Scripture and Tradition, the Catholic Church also teaches about purgatory and hell. One may need to undergo purification after death to become fully like God in order to be fully united to him in heaven. Teaching on hell does not contradict the teaching that God wants all people to be saved (cf. 1 Tm 2:4), but shows that God respects the free choice of created persons, even to the point of allowing them to exclude themselves from communion with him and the blessed forever. Cf. e.g., CCC, nn. 946-1065; Pascal Foresi, *Theology of Social Man* (New York: New City Press, 1967), Chs. 13 and 14; and von Balthasar (see note 8), 409-25.

47. Cf. parts of Chs. II-IV - see the index. For a recent synthesis of Catholic teaching on the sacrament of matrimony see CCC, nn. 1601-66. For theological treatments see, e.g., Edward Schillebeeckx, *Marriage: Human Reality and Saving Mystery* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1965); May (see note 12), Ch. 2; Flaman (see note 5), Ch. III.7.d; and Pope John Paul II, a number of his General Audiences from Jul. 28, 1982 to Jul. 4, 1984, *The Theology of Marriage and Celibacy* (see note 43). Cf. also *Embodied in Love: Sacramental Spirituality and Sexual Intimacy: A New Catholic Guide to Marriage* (New York: Crossroad, 1986), by Charles Gallagher, George Maloney, Mary Rousseau and Paul Wilczak.

relationship with his bride, the Church, including his faithful and unconditional self-giving love, is a model for Christian spouses.(cf. Eph 5:21-33)

As a sacrament, Christian marriage is an efficacious means of grace.<sup>48</sup> Christ, the principal minister of all the sacraments, is the source of this grace. The man and woman are the human co-ministers of this sacrament. As such, through their giving themselves to each other in love, they also give Christ and his love, healing, forgiveness, and so on, to each other. They minister their sacrament not only when they give their unconditional marital consent to each other, but throughout their marriage whenever they love and give themselves to each other, in their sexual union and many other ways.

By means of this sacrament, Christ consecrates the spouses to God and comes to abide with them as a couple. He offers them all the grace they need to have a good and holy marriage (not one without any suffering), to fulfill all the duties of their state (i.e. marital, parental,...), and to give glory to God together. The sacraments are not automatic or magical means of grace though. As recipients and ministers of the sacrament of matrimony, the dispositions and free cooperation of the spouses, with the help Christ offers, are extremely important. If their marriage, including their marital love and sexual union, is to be truly fruitful, a vibrant "sign" of Christ's love for his Bride, the Church, it is essential that they grow in their unity with Christ and each other. With regard to this, it is important that they communicate openly and frequently with Christ in prayer and with each other, that they try to live all the Christian virtues to the best of their ability, and that they protect

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48. The sacraments are special means, but not the only means of grace. Cf., e.g., also good spiritual reading, prayer, and so on. It should also be noted that since God wants to save all people, he also wants to bless "non-sacramental" marriages and offers grace in many ways to spouses in such marriages. Consider, e.g., the marriage of Joseph and Mary, the parents of Jesus. Their marriage was certainly very blessed by God and holy, although not a Christian sacramental marriage, since Christian baptism had not yet been instituted.

and develop their conjugal love in many ways, on a daily basis.

Faithful to Christ's teaching (cf. Mt 19:3-9; and par.), Catholic teaching holds that a valid consummated Christian marriage is indissoluble. "Valid" presupposes, among other things, the man and woman's free and unconditional consent to marry before God; consummation, their becoming "one flesh", in a sense, completes their "verbal" consent.(cf. Ch. IV.F above) In such a marriage, the couple do not only share bonds on the emotional and existential levels. They are also joined by God. Their sacramental marriage bond and covenant participates in the indissoluble covenant between Christ and the Church. A man and woman who truly love each other experience their irrevocable marital consent as a fulfillment of their love. They are happy and grateful that their marriage is objectively indissoluble in Christ, beyond human frailties and above all emotional changes. Christ who is faithful offers them the example and help they need to be faithful to their vows to each other, solemnly exchanged before God.<sup>49</sup>

Christ does not annihilate the nature of marriage and conjugal love, but fulfills God's original plan of creation concerning them superabundantly. God's redeeming love heals and perfects human love, including conjugal love. The more spouses are open to God's love, the more they will appreciate the dignity and beauty of each other, including the value and meaning of their bodies and sexuality, as created and redeemed by God. They will become more integrated within themselves, more in harmony with each other, and care for each other more deeply. Each of them will be concerned not only for his or her beloved's temporal good, but also for his or her salvation, sanctification and eternal happiness.

### **Other Relationships "in the Lord"**

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49. Cf. von Hildebrand, *Marriage* (see note 10), Ch. 2.

God wants to heal not only marital relationships, but all other kinds of human relationships as well including those between parents and children, brothers and sisters, friends, and so on. These can be made new "in the Lord" too. Divine love can heal the love in such relationships from sin and the effects of sin (cf. selfishness, lust, possessiveness...), and ennoble and perfect them. If the people involved are open to God's love and love one another as Jesus loves them, he will be present in their midst. Their love can also be a sign and instrument of Christ's love and healing.

This pertains to nonmarital man-woman relationships and friendships as well. Not all people are able to marry or find a suitable marriage partner. Many, including many young people, will marry sometime in the future. Some are also called by God to give themselves to him in a special way and enter into a certain spiritual exclusive "nuptial" union with him by choosing celibacy for the sake of God's Kingdom. Man-woman complementarity includes not only the physical (cf. sexual union and procreation), but also the psychological, moral and spiritual dimensions of persons. Therefore, involvements and friendships between men and women who are not married to each other can be beneficial and mutually enriching, provided they are conducted in ways that properly respect morally relevant values such as truth and the dignity of persons, and God's will and plan. God wants such relationships to be holy, chaste and pure - that the people involved love in a properly ordered way. This includes being concerned for each other's salvation and sanctification. The history of the saints shows that such holy and pure relationships are possible. Consider, for example, the relationships of Francis de Sales and Jane Frances de Chantal, Francis and Claire, Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross, Bernard of Clairvaux and Countess Ermengard, Martin de Porres and Rose of Lima.<sup>50</sup>

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50. Cf. von Hildebrand, *Man and Woman* (see note 10), 69-74; Paul Hinnebusch, *Friendship in the Lord* (Notre Dame, Ind.: Ave Maria Press, 1974); Paul Conner, *Celibate Love* (London: Sheed

God's plan of redemption includes reconciling us with all creation, including non-personal creation. If we are open to God's redeeming love and guidance, he will help us to restore a harmonious relationship with our environment and ecosystem. This includes our exercising responsible stewardship by respecting animals, plants and other non-personal beings, as created good by God, and respecting God's purposes in our using them to meet our needs and give glory to God. Although God's plan concerning the redemption of all creation will only be fully realized when he establishes the new heaven and the new earth, doing our part now is important for our own redemption.<sup>51</sup>

### **Collaborating with God**

With respect to the mystery of the redemption, we can also note here briefly our role in collaborating with God's providence and our collaborating with Jesus Christ, the Redeemer, as co-redeemers. God wants us to collaborate with him in providing for or meeting various human needs (biological, psychological, social, moral and spiritual) in our families, work, art, ministries, friendships, organizations, and so forth. Consider, for instance the teaching of Is 58:6-8 that "your wound [will] be quickly healed over", if you "break unjust fetters", "let the oppressed go free", share "your food with the hungry", shelter "the homeless poor", clothe someone you see "lacking clothes", and do not "turn away from your own kin"; and Jesus' teaching in Mt 25:31-46 that what we do to the "least", we do to him. (NJB) Concerning our topics, we can consider, for example, how we can

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and Ward, 1980); Michel Pochet, *Sex Redeemed* (London: New City, 1990); and Ch. VI-VIII below. Chervin (see note 2) treats typical vices of men and women as well as healing and living virtuously.

51. Regarding our being responsible stewards of our environment, cf. e.g., the sources referred to in note 31 above. Regarding the new heaven and new earth, cf. e.g., Acts 3:21; Eph 1:10; Col 1:20; LG, n. 48; GS, n. 39; CCC, nn. 1042-50; Edward Schillebeeckx and Boniface Willems, *The Problem of Eschatology* (New York: Paulist Press, 1969; von Balthasar (see note 8), 409-25.

best respond to the various needs of pregnant teenagers and single parents, and the need of the young and not so young for holistic sex education.

The Christian vision includes our collaborating with Jesus Christ in his work of redemption, as co-redeemers, by sharing in his priestly, kingly and prophetic roles.(cf. e.g., 1 Pet 2:4-10) Among other things, this means participating in his Paschal Mystery, including sharing his suffering and joy. Being a Christian does not mean not having to experience suffering and death. Rather, these are given a new meaning in Christ. Our sufferings in union with Christ can benefit ourselves and others.(cf. Col 1:24) If we love God, who is all-powerful, he can and will work in everything, including our sufferings, for the good.(cf. Rm 8:28; and A.4 above) Even in this life we can begin to share in the joy of the risen Jesus. Our present sufferings will be far outweighed by the happiness and glory of eternal life.(cf. Rm 8:18) God's plan concerning all of this shows just how much God loves us, how intimate a relationship he wants to have with each of us, and how exalted is our dignity in Jesus Christ.<sup>52</sup>

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52. Cf. e.g., GS, n. 22; Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation on "The Vocation and the Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World" *Christifideles Laici* (Ottawa: CCCB, 1988), and Apostolic Letter "On the Christian Meaning of Suffering" *Salvifici Doloris* (Boston: St. Paul Editions, 1984); George Kosicki, *The Good News of Suffering: Mercy and Salvation for All* (Colegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1981); and the articles on "Salvation" in *Encyclopedia of Theology* (London: Burns & Oates, 1975), ed. by Karl Rahner. In a way analogous to the sacraments, by a decree of God, Jesus' offering himself by suffering, shedding his blood and dying for our salvation, is an efficacious sign and means of God's saving grace, his redeeming love. Just as the collaboration of parents with God in procreation does not take away from God being the one Creator, our collaborating with Jesus as co-redeemers does not take away from his unique role as the Redeemer. In *The Broken Body* (New York: Paulist Press, 1988), Jean Vanier assures us that we can find peace and joy if we accept the reality of suffering and the cross in our own lives and come close to the suffering of others. Chiara Lubich "personalizes" suffering, both one's own and that of others, by seeing in it Jesus Crucified and Forsaken (cf. Mt 27:46) to be loved. She and many others of the Focolare Movement have experienced this as a "key" to unity with God and others, and experiencing the joy of the risen Jesus. Cf. her *Unity and Jesus Forsaken* (New York: New City Press, 1985).

If we consider the full meaning of the Good News of redemption in Christ, including total liberation from sin and all evils, our complete healing and reconciliation, eternal life and resurrection of the body, and the new heaven and earth, we realize that such salvation is not possible by human power alone. It is only possible by the infinite power of God, and our free cooperation and collaboration with him. Even though we can begin to experience the fruits of the redemption in this life, it is difficult for us to articulate and understand its full meaning. Our final goal according to God's plan is much better, it involves a fuller and more dynamic life of mutual love, than we can conceive or imagine.(cf. 1 Cor 2:9-10)

If we believe in an omnipotent God who loves us perfectly, then the whole Christian vision can be appreciated as reasonable and realistic, even if we do not understand it fully. In concluding this section, it is important to note that the various Christian mysteries including God, Creation, Sin, Incarnation and Redemption, throw light on each other. An integral vision appreciates the unity of all truth.

## **B. The Christian Vocation**

The English word "vocation" comes from the Latin *vocare* meaning "to call". By Christian vocation we mean all that it means to be called to follow Jesus, to be his disciples, and to be transformed in Christ. Previous parts of this book treat many issues that are relevant to this, especially with respect to sex, marriage and love. Section A of this chapter is very relevant since the Christian vocation is deeply interrelated with the Christian vision. The whole fields of Christian morality and spirituality pertain to the Christian vocation. Morality focuses on how we ought to choose and act; spirituality refers to a way of life. Christian morality and spirituality pertain to how

we ought to choose, act and live according to a Christian perspective. We can not properly understand this unless we understand the Christian vision - where we came from, where we are, and where we are called to go. The New Testament pastoral letter to Titus contains the exhortation to preach or teach the behavior that goes with sound doctrine (cf. 2:1). Orthopraxis (right doing - correct morality, living, spirituality, pastoral action...) is inseparable from orthodoxy (right belief - having a correct, integral vision). This section treats a number of essential points concerning the Christian vocation. The following chapters examine particular issues such as premarital sexual intercourse and petting, the proper expression of love and affection in premarital relationships, and sex education, in the light of the Christian vision and vocation, human experience, and Catholic teaching.

### **1. Following Jesus**

During his life on earth, according to the Gospels, Jesus invited or called a number of people to follow him, to be his disciples (see, e.g., Mt 4:18-22 and 10; Lk 10:1-24). Before his ascension he gave instructions to "make disciples of all nations; baptize them ... and teach them to observe all the commands I gave you ... I am with you always; yes, to the end of time."(Mt 28:16-20 NJB; cf. Ac 1:6-11) We, men and women of today, are also called or invited to follow Jesus, to become his disciples. What does it really mean to be a disciple of Jesus? Chapter II.B treats some New Testament teachings, including some teachings of Jesus, and Chs. III and IV treat some other important teachings of the Christian heritage, that are relevant to answering this question (cf. also Ch. I regarding making good choices from a Christian perspective and other parts of this book). We refer to these to avoid unnecessary repetition here, and note that here our intention is only to highlight some points treated more fully elsewhere and to present a few additional key points.



As a good Master or Teacher, indeed the greatest, Jesus first of all set a good example, modeling his message by his life of fidelity to God's will, sensitive care for people, service, self-giving love, and prayer. He calls us to a radical conversion to God, to renounce all sin and sinful attachments, to embrace and do God's will in everything, to grow in perfect love of God, others and oneself. While Jesus taught, in general, that all of morality is related to loving God, others and oneself in a properly ordered way, his teaching also includes many specific moral teachings. These help clarify the meaning of such love.

Christian love includes sensitively responding to real human needs (cf. Mt 25:31-46). We cannot claim to love God whom we cannot see, if we close our hearts to people and their needs, to loving his beloved children. Christian love keeps God's commandments.(cf. 1 Jn 3-4) It appreciates and properly respects the values or goods that these commandments are meant to protect and promote, values important for a true communion of persons and happiness such as the dignity of persons, human life, truth, justice, and marital fidelity (cf. Mt 19:16-22). Other teachings of Jesus highlight the importance of these and other values such as: humility, gentleness, mercy, peace, sincerity, good will to all, genuine prayer, fasting and almsgiving, trust in God; purity of heart and true self-control (regarding sexual and other areas of morality, regarding both one's intentions and actions);<sup>53</sup> good example, loving fraternal correction, prayer in common, forgiveness; the unity and indissolubility of marriage; renunciation, including sexual renunciation, for Christ's sake; service, friendship, self-giving and sacrificial love; unity with himself and others; and the supreme goodness

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53. In his General Audience on Nov. 12, 1980 (see note 26), Pope John Paul II says Christ in Mt 5:27-28 calls us to a true mastery of one's impulses, to a "full and mature spontaneity" regarding man-woman relations, which does not suffocate the noble desires and aspirations of the human heart but frees and facilitates them. "Carnal man" knows nothing or very little of this deeper, mature spontaneity.

and glory of God.(see, e.g., Mt 5-7, 15:17-20 and 18-19; and par.; Jn 13-17; and Ch. II.B above)<sup>54</sup>

Jesus' teaching, as a whole and specifically, promotes respecting and living according to a true objective hierarchy of values. God and his will, and loving God with all one's being, are first in importance. Material things and our seeking the pleasures of life, including sexual pleasures, are to be subordinated to loving God and people. Holistic Christian love, best exemplified by Jesus, true God and true man, harmoniously integrates divine and human love. It thus incarnates God's holy unconditional pure healing love in human choices, inner dispositions, feelings, and actions including respectful touching. Christian love animates all the Christian virtues, including chastity and purity, as well as the gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit, and empowers us to grow in living them.<sup>55</sup>

If one wants to be a disciple of Jesus, one needs to deny oneself and take up one's cross every day. Jesus teaches the paradox that one saves or finds one's life by losing it for his sake and the sake of the Gospel.(cf. Mt 8:34-38; and par.) Christian love is not selfish or egocentric. It does not flee from fulfilling one's responsibilities, that is, faithfully doing God's will and meeting the requirements of true love, even when these involve suffering on one's part, as they often do, and solidarity with the suffering of others. Dietrich von Hildebrand relates losing one's life to find it to human experience regarding the call of morally relevant values and our proper response to them. If we seek the merely subjectively satisfying in a way that fails to respect properly what is good-in-itself, morally relevant values such as God, the dignity of persons, the sacredness of human life, truth, justice, self-giving and faithful love, purity, marriage and procreation (cf. e.g. sinful pride,

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54. Good biblical commentaries (cf., e.g., JBC and NJBC) can help us to better understand the context and meaning of specific teachings of Jesus as well as other biblical teachings. Cf. also such works such as *The Moral Teaching of the New Testament* (London: Burns & Oates, 1975), by Rudolf Schnackenburg.

55. Cf. Wojtyla (see note 19); and the sources referred to in note 42 above.

lust, promiscuity, and nonmarital sex), we will become isolated within ourselves and not find true fulfillment. On the other hand, if we surrender to the call of morally relevant values (they transcend our experience of them since they are rooted in God and reflect his goodness), properly respect them, and in a sense lose or give ourselves for their sake, we will be personally enriched, and find true fulfillment in authentic communion with God and others.<sup>56</sup>

Jesus calls us as disciples not in isolation or to be "lone rangers" (cf. individualism), but to form Christian community in union with him (see, e.g., Mt 10 and par. regarding the mission of the Twelve; Lk 10:1-16 regarding his sending the disciples out in two's to minister in his name, that is, in his person, as his personal agents; and Jn 13:34-5 and 15:12-13 regarding his new commandment to his disciples to love one another as he loves them). Much of the New Testament pastoral teaching is about building healthy, holy, united and healing communities that minister to the various needs of people, based on the complete truth of the Gospel revealed in Jesus Christ. Christians are to be properly open to God's love and grace, and be properly responsive to the Holy Spirit and his various gifts. They are to grow together to full maturity in Christ. This call to form authentic Christian community applies to Christian ministries, human friendships, all man-woman relationships, marriage, family life, and the Church, both local churches and the universal Church

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56. Von Hildebrand speaks of morally relevant values, their call, our proper response to them, and human experience concerning these in many places in his writings (see, e.g., his books referred to in notes 7, 10 and 42 above). He is quite aware that some people are blind or prejudiced regarding values or certain values. He advocates an openness to the givenness of reality in our experience, to all of the data of human experience including the experience of Jesus and the saints. It is all right to enjoy the subjectively satisfying, e.g., to enjoy a warm bath or for a husband and wife to enjoy having sexual relations with each other, as long as this does not conflict with properly respecting morally relevant values.

of Christ.<sup>57</sup>

Jesus' commandment is that we love one another as he loves us, as the Father loves him. This is a call to grow in perfect self-giving love that does good to all, to grow in loving as God loves, to be holy as God is holy.(cf. Jn 15:9-13; Mt 5:48; 1 Jn 3; LG, Ch. 5) God has taken the initiative in loving us by creating us, sending his eternal Son to make himself one with us in all things except sin, and by Jesus laying down his life and dying for us while we were still sinners.(cf. Gen 1-2; Heb 4:15-16; Rm 5:7-11; 1 Jn 4:10) Loving as God, as Jesus, loves means, therefore, not waiting for others to love us before we love them. It means that each of us in union with Jesus should take the initiative in loving, caring and serving, in making fruitful use of one's God-given talents and gifts (cf. Jn 15:1-17 and Mt 25:14-30), and that one make oneself one with others, too, in all things except sin. Such love is impossible by human effort alone. It only becomes possible if we allow God to infuse and empower us with his love. With respect to this, Rm 5:5 speaks of the love of God being poured into human hearts by the gift of the Holy Spirit. In Lk 11:9-13 (NJB) Jesus teaches that if human fathers know how to give their children what is good, "how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" This underscores the necessity of prayer to lead the Christian life, to be an authentic follower of Jesus.<sup>58</sup>

Loving perfectly as God, as Jesus, loves involves only having good intentions and never having evil intentions, only doing good and never doing evil.(cf. 1 Th 5:19-22) It means willing in

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57. Cf. e.g., J. Terence Forestell, *As Ministers of Christ: The Christological Dimension of Ministry in the New Testament* (New York: Paulist Press, 1991); Thomas Dubay, *Caring: A Biblical Theology of Community* (Denville: Dimension Books, 1973); and Jean Vanier, *Community and Growth: Our Pilgrimage Together* (Toronto: Griffin House, 1979).

58. Cf. Chiara Lubich, *When Our Love is Charity* (New York: New City Press, 1971); and Aumann (see note 9), Chs. 5-14.

conformity with God's will. Although God permits or tolerates certain evils (e.g. our sins), it would be contrary to God's goodness and perfection to directly will or do evil. If we are to follow Jesus, our ultimate goal or fundamental option needs to be the same as God's ultimate goal for us: God himself and his kingdom, our eternal beatitude, our true good or integral fulfillment in Christ. Our other short-term or long-term goals, as well as the means or actions we choose to try to accomplish these goals or ends, need to be capable of being ordered to this ultimate goal. In order for this to be the case, one needs to respect properly morally relevant goods or values in one's choices of goals and means or actions. To love as God loves, one needs to respect values such as the supreme goodness of God, the dignity of persons, the sacredness of human life, justice, truth, friendship, marriage, procreation, and self-giving and faithful love, as God does, in all of one's intentions and actions.<sup>59</sup>

For instance, goals such as to prepare oneself for an honorable career or Christian ministry whereby one can serve people, to get married and have a family, to live a healthier lifestyle, and other essentially good goals, can be in conformity with God's will. On the other hand, goals such as to escape from one's responsibilities, to become a rich prostitute or criminal, to seduce someone, and the like, cannot be ordered to God's love and one's true good. Actions such as prayer, studying, various kinds of honorable recreation and work, sexual foreplay and vaginal intercourse within marriage, and various ways of responding to the needs of others, can be expressions of holistic love. On the other hand, actions such as various kinds of abuse including sexual abuse, nonmarital sex including premarital sex, direct abortion, contraception, suicide, and cheating, are contrary to the

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59. Cf. Benedict Ashley and Kevin O'Rourke, *Health Care Ethics* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1997), Chs. 7-8, regarding ethical methodologies and Christian principles of ethical action including the Principle of Moral Discrimination.

love of God and our dignity as persons created in God's image. To follow Jesus, we need to love and respect all that is good as he does. Because of our limits and various circumstances, however, we cannot act to realize all goods at once. At times we can be called to refrain from acting to realize a certain good out of respect for or to promote another morally relevant good or value. For example, refraining from telling a confidential truth, not using excessively burdensome means to prolong one's life, a married couple practicing periodic sexual abstinence during fertile times (i.e. natural family planning) to space or limit their family size for just reasons, not going on an outing with friends to study for an important exam, not getting married for the sake of God's kingdom, and so forth.<sup>60</sup>

According to Catholic teaching one should never do evil, any intrinsically evil action, to achieve or try to achieve good.(cf. Rm 3:8) At times one can be called to tolerate a lesser evil to avoid a greater evil or to promote a greater good, or called to do good, even when one foresees one's action(s) may or will result in some harm or evil consequences. For example, in some

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60. We will consider nonmarital sex, especially issues related to premarital sex, further in the following chapters of this book. Abortion and contraception will also be considered further, especially in Ch. VI.E and F; and Ch. IX.A regarding cooperation with others. Here we will only briefly note that both nonmarital sex, and direct contraception and sterilization, objectively violate both the nuptial or marital / total giving and receiving / unitive and procreative meanings (as well as their interrelationship) of the conjugal act as designed by God and confirmed by human experience. The direct killing of innocent human beings in direct abortion, euthanasia and suicide, objectively violates the value of human life created in God's image. Cf., e.g., also Ashley and O'Rourke (see note 59), Chs. 9-10 regarding abortion, and sexual ethics including contraception, natural family planning, and Ch. 13 regarding ethical issues related to dying including euthanasia and allowing to die; Ronald Lawler, Joseph Boyle and William E. May, *Catholic Sexual Ethics* (Huntington: Our Sunday Visitor, 1985), Chs. 6-8; Quay and Kippley (see note 12); and Germain Grisez with the help of others, *The Way of the Lord Jesus*, vol. 2, *Living a Christian Life* (Quincy: Franciscan Press, 1993), especially Chs. 8 and 9 regarding ethical issues related to human life, health, bodily integrity, marriage, sexual acts, and family life. The newer methods of natural family planning, the ovulation and sympto-thermal methods, are highly effective and have many advantages.

circumstances, treating a serious pathological condition can have the indirect effect of rendering a person sterile or of harming an unborn child, or trying to save someone's life can involve considerable risk to one's own. Concerning such things we can note again that even God, who never does or directly wills evil, often permits or tolerates evil, to respect or promote other goods. Jesus himself remained faithful to God, and his identity and mission, even though he foresaw that others would torture and kill him for this.(cf., e.g., Mt 16:13-23 and 26:39)<sup>61</sup>

Following Jesus, loving as he loves, fulfilling our God-given responsibilities, is not always easy, but it is possible with God's help.(cf. e.g., Mt 19:23-26 and Lk 1:37) When we fail, God wants us to acknowledge our sins, ask for and accept his forgiveness, and begin again.(cf. e.g., 1 Jn 1:8-9; Lk 15; Jn 8:1-11) If we try our best to follow Jesus, to love God in union with Jesus, we will bear much fruit that will last. God, who is all-good and all-powerful, will work out everything for the best.(cf. Jn 15 and Rm 8:28)

## **2. Transformation in Christ**

Following Jesus and putting into practice all of his teachings, including his new commandment to love as he loves, may seem to some people to be idealistic, unrealistic, unrealizable, utopian. The specific moral and spiritual teachings of Jesus, as well as those of the Catholic Church, need to be seen in the context of an integral vision, including God's plan to transform us in Christ (cf. section

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61. Cf. Pope Paul VI, HV, nn. 14-16. For a recent synthesis on Catholic moral teaching, in general and regarding many specific issues, and with many references to other documents, see CCC, Part Three "Life in Christ". See also Pope John Paul II's Encyclical Letters *Veritatis Splendor* Regarding Certain Fundamental Questions of the Church's Moral Teaching (Ottawa: CCCB, 1993) and *Evangelium Vitae* The Gospel of Life (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1995). Cf., e.g., von Hildebrand (see note 7); Grisez (see notes 21 and 60); Lawler, Boyle and May (see note 60), Ch. 4 regarding patterns of thinking in moral theology; and Ashley and O'Rourke (see note 59), 191-200, regarding the Principles of Double Effect, Legitimate Cooperation, and Professional Communication.

A above). An integral vision is indicated by both the teachings of Jesus and the Catholic Church, taken in their entirety. This vision is realistic and hopeful in the best sense, because it is open to all of reality, including the full truth of who God is, who we are, and the Good News of God's plan to completely save and transform us in Jesus Christ. In the light of this integral vision, trying to be an ever more faithful and mature disciple of Jesus makes sense. Indeed, this is the most realistic and reasonable way to live.

The Christian vocation is not about following arbitrary impersonal rules, but about following a real person, Jesus Christ. Each of us is called, along with others, to enter into and grow in an intimate personal relationship with Jesus, God the Father, and their Holy Spirit. This relationship is meant to completely transform each of us and all of our relationships in Christ. We are called to share in God's abundant life, to become new men and women in Christ.(cf. Jn 10:10; Eph 4:17-32) This includes one's mind being renewed so that one can more and more understand everything - God, others, oneself, our bodies and sexuality, non-personal beings, and all values - in proper perspective, in the light of Christ. It also involves, among other things, one's heart being healed of pride, selfishness, and hardness, so that one can become free to love truly as a son or daughter of God.

Coming into a personal relationship with God and being transformed in Christ is meant to begin in this life. The ultimate goal of this transformation is that we become like God (cf. 1 Jn 3), fully united with him and each other forever in the new heaven and earth. Those who fully surrender themselves to God and allow him to fully transform them in Christ will enjoy perfect happiness in that future life. That life will involve a fully human life that shares fully in God's divine superabundant life. It will involve seeing God as he is and fully enjoying and participating in the



interpersonal life of the Trinity. It will also involve fully enjoying other persons and the rest of God's good creation in union with him. It will be much better than we can now conceive or imagine.(cf. section A.5 above)

It is impossible to be fully united with God, and each other in God, unless we cooperate with God and allow him to make us like himself, to fully transform us in Christ, to perfect our love, to share in his divine nature (cf. 2 Pet 1:4). In order for anyone to "arrive" at this "destiny", it is essential that one turn from all sin and turn to God. It is thus necessary to keep all of God's commandments, including Jesus' new commandment to love one another as he loves us.(cf. Mt 5:17-19; Jn 13:34-35)

Although the Christian vocation involves the highest moral standards, also with respect to sex and marriage, these are none other than the requirements of a properly ordered love of God, others, oneself, and the rest of creation. With regard to following Jesus and our transformation in Christ, and the objective requirements of genuine Christian morality and spirituality, it is helpful to appreciate that as historical beings in this life, we develop by stages of growth. God calls us to grow, day by day, in understanding and living according to his plan, also with respect to sex and marriage, with the help of his grace. It would be wrong, however, to distort or water down for oneself or anyone else, God's commandments, his call to become holy and pure as he is, to love as Jesus loves. Such would be counterproductive in terms of reaching the destiny God wants for all of us.(see, e.g., all of 1 Jn)<sup>62</sup>

Following Jesus and being transformed in Christ is only possible for us if we really enter into a personal relationship with him. Jesus, true God and true man, is the best friend anyone can

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62. Cf., e.g., Pope John Paul II, FC, n. 34, regarding moral progress.

have.(cf. section A.4 above) Authentic Christian prayer, communication with God in Christ, is thus indispensable for truly living the Christian life. We can benefit immensely by sharing everything with Christ - all of our concerns and questions, thoughts and feelings, hopes and disappointments, joys and sufferings, and so forth. In prayer we can praise God for his infinite goodness, wisdom and love; thank him for the many ways he has blessed us; confess our sins to God and accept his forgiveness and healing; and ask him for all the help we need to do his will and to follow Jesus more faithfully. We can also ask him to empower us to grow in understanding and living according to his plan, regarding sex and every other area of our lives. Finally, we can ask him to fully transform us in Christ.<sup>63</sup>

In the following chapters of this book we will examine some contemporary arguments for and against premarital sexual intercourse, and other issues related to our topics such as premarital sexual petting, the proper expression of love in premarital relationships, choosing a marriage partner, and sex education. We will examine these in the light of human experience, following Jesus (cf. the Christian vision and vocation), and Catholic teaching.

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63. For further reading regarding our transformation in Christ, see, e.g., Aumann, *Spiritual Theology* (see note 9); and Dietrich von Hildebrand, *Transformation in Christ* (Garden City, New York: Image Books, 1963). Regarding Christian prayer cf., e.g., also CCC, Part Four, which includes many references to the Bible, classical Christian sources, and other Catholic documents. For further reading regarding a holistic Christian anthropology see the whole Bible and good commentaries; other classical Christian sources such as the writings of saints and doctors of the Church; various documents of the Catholic Church including the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC), which is amazing for its breadth; and the writings of various Christian philosophers and theologians; etc. It is important to keep in mind that some "Christian" sources are more reliable than others, and always try to discern what is true and what is not in the light of Jesus Christ.