

# God's Plan for Marriage and Sexuality

## Appendix 3

**What follows below is an example of how one might attempt to introduce the engaged couple to the concepts and teaching of *Theology of the Body* This is not intended as a "script" to be presented, but one approach that might be developed in your own style.**

### **God reveals Himself through creation, especially human beings**

Our faith tells us that we can discover a glimpse of our Creator through studying His creation. Just as a meadow of wildflowers, a spectacular sunset or a newborn baby fills us with awe at the beauty of creation, our own bodyliness...our masculinity and femininity, our very sexuality, is a reflection of who God is and how He loves us!

### **Natural law**

And natural law tells us that if we act honestly, in harmony with the truth revealed in creation, our actions are moral (holy), but if we act in opposition to creation, denying the truths it reveals, our actions are immoral (potentially sinful).

We human beings have been given many unique faculties, or abilities, that God did not give to other species, and he gave us the freedom to either use these gifts as their nature intends, or to abuse them in opposition to their nature.

For example, we have been given the faculty of speech...communicating with words formed and expressed by our bodies. It is clearly the intended nature of speech to tell the truth (otherwise all speech would be meaningless, as we could not trust what was said.) And we can choose to abuse that gift by speaking falsely (lying) to deceive another person. But our bodies are so "wired" to follow the nature God has imprinted in this gift that we involuntarily try to block a lie from leaving our mouth (the "lump" in our throat as it tries to keep the lie from being spoken) and we exhibit involuntary physiological changes that can be measured by a "lie detector" device!

### **Three truths revealed in the nature of sex**

So it is with the nature of sex. We can clearly observe three dimensions that are undeniably contained in the nature of sexual intercourse. First, it is procreative...it is the natural way that new human life is formed. (It could have been a stork; it could have been a cabbage leaf) but God created sex as the way to reproduce human beings.

Second, sexual intercourse is unifying, or bonding of the persons. Studies have shown that the same hormone, oxytocin, which causes a mother to bond with her baby in childbirth and nursing, is released in both partners in sex. Perhaps this is why premarital sex can often lead to the wrong choice of a partner, as the "super glue" of married relationship, which God intended to help marriages through the good times and

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the bad, can blind a person who is not yet in the totally committed, permanent, self-giving relationship of marriage to the warning signs of a bad decision.

And third, less spoken of from the pulpit, but just as much in the nature of sex, God intended sex to be uniquely physically pleasurable. This is certainly evident in our pleasure-seeking society where sex is a form of recreation, in even the most casual relationships, and even prostitution. So, if the nature of sex and sexual intercourse is at once procreative, bonding, and pleasurable, that is clearly what God intended. But, like all other gifts, we can abuse it by ignoring, denying, or tampering with the truth revealed in its proper nature.

## **Honoring the truth of the nature of sex**

For example, if a couple chooses to enjoy the pleasures of sex, with no attempt to prevent it from being procreative, but they have no intent or desire for their sexual encounter to bond them for life...they have not entered the permanent, self-giving, unconditional relationship of marriage...they are clearly acting selfishly, and thus immorally.

And if a married couple, who desires their sexual relationship to unify and bond them, have sex with no attempt to deny the possibility of conception, but one or the other (or both) selfishly seek their own pleasure, using their partner as an object to achieve their own satisfaction (lust) rather than a total self-giving to the other as person (spousal love), it is immoral.

And finally, if a married couple, intending to strengthen their bonded relationship, give and receive the pleasures of sex together, choose to prevent the possibility of new life resulting from their intercourse (by using contraception) they are withholding from each other the essential element of fruitfulness which completes the nature of their sexual relationship.

## **Lying with our bodies is Lust, not Love**

Like the gift of speech, sex is a form of communication, created to express total commitment, unselfish giving to another, for the transmission of life. When we deny, or contradict, or eliminate any part of the language of sex as God created it, we have been duped into settling for lust, rather than love. We can lie with our bodies even more profoundly than with our voices.

It is only in a free, faithful, and fruitful giving of self to another that we truly experience love as the divine language God created for us. Thus, fully and properly understanding the God-given nature of sex and sexuality is essential to experiencing the fullness of this gift, and avoiding a counterfeit experience which leads us away from God. We should always be striving to be more honest with our bodies to fully experience God's plan for our true joy.

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## What about family planning?

So, are we then just expected to have as many children as possible? Does that mean we have no ability to plan and space our family? No, the church teaches (in *Humanae Vitae*) that, "responsible parenthood is exercised by those who prudently and generously decide to have more children, and by those who, for serious reasons and with due respect to moral precepts, decide not to have additional children for either a certain or indefinite period of time." (HV 10)

Thus, if there are serious and unselfish reasons to avoid pregnancy without foregoing the other gifts of marital sex, married couples may take advantage of the natural cycles of fertility readily observable in the woman's body, and limit intercourse to those times that are infertile, "thus controlling birth in a way which does not in the least offend the moral principles..." (HV 16)

## Serious and unselfish reasons to avoid pregnancy

Consider, for example, a couple with three children in diapers, mom at her wits' end, dad working two jobs to keep food on the table...would it be prudent and responsible for them to decide to have another child at that time? Probably not, although if they did become pregnant, they should rejoice in this new life, trusting that God will provide what they need.

But consider a young couple, married five years, and still not "ready" to start a family because kids are expensive and a hassle, and they want to go to Europe next summer and pick up a new BMW! Would that fit the test of "serious and unselfish reasons"? Not so much...

So, when serious and unselfish reasons exist, a couple can use the natural cycle of fertility to continue to enjoy the (much needed) graces of their sexual relationship, while practicing abstinence (with its own gifts) during fertile times to avoid pregnancy until their situation has changed.

## Natural Family Planning

Again, God has given us freedom to choose, and the means to be responsible parents. The course on Natural Family Planning, which you will take with your preparation for matrimony, will teach you the readily understandable, and highly reliable tools for either avoiding, or achieving pregnancy naturally...avoiding all the physical and moral pitfalls of contraception, and working with, not against, the nature of sexuality.

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## God's nature (community of love in Trinity) revealed in marriage

But even more profoundly, God made us sexual beings not just for bonding, procreation, and pleasure, but to reveal to us His own nature... a community of three distinct persons living in an eternal relationship of love, from which all life flows. It is through our bodies that we experience this taste of divinity...the call and ability to give ourselves fully, as person, to another person.

## We are persons, not objects

How can this be, as God is not a sexual being, but a pure spirit? Well, first of all, God chose to take on human flesh in the person of Jesus Christ, to "meet us where we are" in a human body.

We are each created uniquely as a person, with emotions, needs and desires expressed in different but complementary ways in our masculinity or femininity. Within both is the desire for relationship...to love and to be loved. This, primarily, is a taste of God's own nature.

## "From the beginning..."

Jesus, in speaking on divorce, reminds us that in the beginning, when Adam discovered his need for relationship with another person (none of the animals he named had a soul like him) God said it was not good for Adam to be alone and created woman as his partner. (Gen 2:18) Adam and Eve were created in His image, male and female, and before they turned away from God in sin, they were naked but felt no shame. (Gen 2:25)

Only after the fall, they became ashamed their nakedness, using fig leaves to cover their bodies. Thus began humankind's departure from what God had intended from the beginning...that man and woman would share in perfect, unselfish, open, self-giving intimacy with each other. When sin entered the picture, as the serpent seduced Adam and Eve to seek their own will rather than God's, all became distorted, and human hearts were hardened to God's original plan. We, too, have been seduced by a society and a culture that worships the idol (sex) rather than the truth (God's love imprinted in our sexual nature.)

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## Called to return to the truth of our humanness

Jesus calls us, especially in marriage, to return to God's plan for our human sexuality, to turn away from our convoluted seeking of love by using some thing or some person for my own needs and desires, which is a counterfeit of love, called lust.

Jesus himself gives us the model for true spousal love, a complete self-giving to the other, for the other, not for self, on the cross, in the Eucharist, and in his relationship with us, his Bride, his Church.

## Called to love as Jesus loves us

Jesus' command to us is clear: "Love one another as I have loved you" (Jn 15:12)

And just how does Christ express His love for us?

- Freely ("No one takes my life from me, I lay it down of my own accord," Jn 10:18)
- Totally, without condition or reservation ("He loved them to the last," Jn 13:1)
- Bodily ("This is my body, which is given for you," Lk 22:19)
- Faithfully ("I am with you always," Mt 28:20)
- Fruitfully ("I came that they may have life," Jn 10:10)

As you will see in preparing for your wedding, these same qualities are in your words of consent:

- Freely ("have you come here freely?")
- Totally ("..and without reservation?")
- Bodily ("...to give yourselves to each other")
- Faithfully ("Will you love and honor each other as man and wife for the rest of your lives?")
- Fruitfully ("Will you accept children lovingly from God...?")

So, Matrimony is the Sacrament not just of the couple's witness to God's love within them, but, as St. Paul says, "a great mystery, and I mean in reference to Christ and His Church." (Eph 5:32)

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Jesus calls all of us to look back to "the beginning", before Adam and Eve were seduced away from their free, open, unashamed experience of God's love in their own bodies, and discover that we, too, have been seduced into a counterfeit understanding of our sexuality which limits our ability give and receive spousal love, with our partner, and with God.

## **What does this imply about how we are living before marriage?**

If, at this point, you feel uncomfortable considering that God's plan for your life and for your relationship with your fiancé, may be very different from how you are living today, do not be afraid! Remember, Jesus came not to condemn, but to save.

Acknowledging that I have sinned opens my heart to the healing grace of Jesus' words to the woman caught in adultery... "neither do I condemn you...go, and sin no more." (Jn 8:10)

As the prophet Joel quotes God, "return to me, with all your heart," (Joel 2:12).

Don't hesitate to seek God's forgiveness in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, especially as you prepare to embark on the Sacrament of Matrimony!

## **A new beginning**

Let this time of preparation for marriage be a new beginning for you...an opportunity to explore and discover just how much more wonderful and blessed your lives can become as husband and wife.

There is much to learn about marriage, and sexuality, and as God said, it is all very good! (Gen 1:31)