

**Love and Marriage in the Middle Ages by Fabian Parmisano, O.P.**

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*BY*

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Professor John Noonan's history of the Church's attitude towards  
contraception is a widely used source of factual information.

But it needs to be read with caution. Noonan tried to  
present a picture of an 'evolving' doctrine.

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Noonan's book contains serious misreadings  
of St. Thomas Aquinas.

## **Love and Marriage in the Middle Ages**

### **Part 1**

John Noonan's long history of contraceptive practice and prohibitions [1] demands and merits a second reading—a cautious one. For all the intelligence and careful research that has obviously gone into it, still it has its gaps and misreadings, some of them by no means peripheral to the author's overall picture of an 'evolving', 'developing' ecclesiastical doctrine of love and marriage and the Church's consequent attitudes toward contraception. One of the wider gaps is the failure to consider a man named Nicole Oresme; and one of the more serious misreadings is of St Thomas Aquinas.

Noonan proposes that Martin le Maistre—a late fifteenth-century layman of considerable standing and reputation in the University of Paris—was the first theologian to make the 'modern' breakthrough. [2] Prior to him the Augustinian insistence, found also in St Thomas, on procreative purpose as the only justifying motive for conjugal intercourse held all but exclusive sway. Marriage was rarely or only secondarily thought of in terms of love, and where love happened to be encouraged it was not the kind that had to do with sex.

Sex as a biological function productive of the child, well and good (for the most part) ; but as an expression of love, as an experience of joy and pleasure, no-on pain of at least venial sin. But with le Maistre we have 'the beginning of a new stage in the Catholic approach to marriage'.

His ethics offer reasons justifying conjugal intercourse other than procreation and even suggests (though hesitantly) venereal pleasure as a licit motive. The trend was now at least initiated whereby due consideration was to be given to husband and wife in their mutual relationship of love and sexual fulfilment.

But if one is looking for beginnings he might easily reach back to at least a century prior to le Maistre and find them in the popularized conjugal ethics of another, even more prestigious, University of Paris don and in the theological climate in which he wrote. Nicole Oresme studied theology at the University of Paris around 1318. He became Grand Master of the College of Navarre (the same college at which le Maistre was to function over a century later), was attached as confessor, scholar, and personal friend to the court of Charles V, and ended his days as Bishop of Lisieux.

'Of all the learned clerics who contributed to the remarkable flowering of scholarly productions under the encouragement of Charles V, by far the most distinguished and certainly the most competent was Nicole Oresme.'

[3] Oresme's teaching on marriage is found in his translation of a commentary on the *pseudo-Economics* of Aristotle, one of the many translations of the Aristotelian writings that Nicole undertook, as he himself tells us, at the request of Charles V for 'the common good ... so that he [the king] and his counsellors and others may understand them'.

The first of the two books of the translation-commentary 'examines broadly all the parts of the household and all the interrelated divisions of a household'. The second book 'considers particularly and more fully married life or marriage'. Actually, both books are concerned mainly with the relationship between husband and wife, and the last book almost exclusively so. Thus by the sheer weight of the consideration given to husband and wife and their mutual relations it may be understood what for commentator and author alike is of most importance in marriage. But of this we can have no doubt as we begin to examine what is actually said.

*Text.* The first concern of every man must be for his wife.

*Gloss.* For after the Lord [of the household], his wife holds first place as his companion. Next come the children and then the servants and possessions.

Afterwards he [Aristotle] declares that this concern is primary because of six conditions which obtain in the nuptial relationship between husband and wife more than in any other domestic relationship; for it is natural, reasonable, tender and loving [*amiable*], profitable, divine and harmonious [*divine ei convenable*].

The union is natural, Oresme explains, because the begetting of children is natural, and for this living together is necessary. But among men the union of male and female is not simply natural; it is also the fruit of reason and deliberation, and therefore it is even 'more natural' (*plus naturele*) than among the beasts. The latter 'dwell together indifferently in one species, without reason or election. But it often happens that two young people, a man and a woman, love each other in a special way by choice and with heartfelt joy (*plaisance de cuer*), with a love that is reasoned, though at times not correctly reasoned. . . . Sometimes this is a chaste love and prepares for marriage. And if sin should enter in it is a human fault (*vice humain*). But to approach anyone indifferently with no other love than the desire to satisfy one's concupiscence, this is a bestial sin (*vice bestial*).'

The union between husband and wife is also *amiable*, a word which connotes 'friendship', 'love', 'delight', and so much more to Oresme's thinking, as is evident from his long and engaging explication of it.

His *text* reads that men and women marry not only that they might survive and live but that they might *be* more fully (*bien estre*) and live a *better* life (*bien vivre*). Oresme comments:

That is [that they might live], virtuously as in married friendship, [4] which includes all the causes and kinds of friendship as stated in *Ethics* VIII, 17. For this friendship comprises at once the good of usefulness, the good of pleasure, and the good of virtue and double enjoyment—that is, both the carnal and the virtuous or the sensual and the intellectual pleasures. This friendship exists between two individuals only; for it concerns but one man and one woman as we have said and this is clear from the reasons indicated in *Ethics* VIII, 17.... This friendship is, moreover, permanent and stable and is not to be broken, as pointed out in *Politics* VII, 14. It accords with the injunction of Scripture:

'Whom God hath joined together let no man put asunder' (Matt. 19, 6). Such a friendship is extremely great, as the Scripture notes in the Book of Kings, where it says that Jonathan was more lovable than women: 'Thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women' (II Sam. 1, 26).

And Solomon states it thus: 'The beauty of woman brightens the countenance of her husband and excels every delight of the eye' (Ecclesiasticus XXXVI, 24). It is said of this love of which we are now speaking that Jacob served seven years for the love of Rachel and the time seemed short because of the greatness of his love (Gen. 29, 18). And the Scripture states that a man will leave his father and mother for this love of woman and cleave to his wife (Gen. 2, 26). And the Apostle Paul commands that each man love his wife as himself (Eph. 5, 28).

This is also clear from the fact that nature granted carnal pleasures to the animals only for the purpose of reproduction; but it accorded the human species this pleasure not only for reproduction of its kind but also to enhance and maintain friendship between man and woman. This is implied in Pliny's statement that no female, after she has become pregnant, seeks sexual union, except woman only (*Nat. Hist.* VII, 5).

And this greater unity is a cause of greater friendship. This explains the statement in *Politics* II, 1, that two friends desire to become a single being. Thus we may say that husband and wife are more nearly a unit than the male and female of other species because the first woman was formed from a rib of her husband and this was not the case of the other animals. For this reason, Scripture says that a married couple is two persons in a single skin (Gen. 2, 24). Thus we may now perceive how this life of husband and wife together is based upon friendship. [5]

In the chapters in which he outlines the rules that ought to govern a man in his relations with his wife, Oresme nicely advises the husband as to his sexual conduct. He does not establish a time-table of sexual performance and abstinence. Rather he suggests the need to develop an *art of love*. The husband, he says, must take good care to satisfy his wife's desires, such that she will not be tempted to look for love elsewhere. But he must not over-engage her in sexual love lest she become dangerously restless in his absence or when he is sick; and he must perform the marriage act decently, such as befits its generative purpose.

Courtesy (A. D. Menut's translation of *moult grande honesté*), modesty and self-restraint are advised. The husband must be sensitive to his wife's feelings, must come to her only when she is 'well disposed' (*bien composee*). He must not abuse her as though she were a *fole femme*, treating her roughly *trop* (*hardiment*) and in a dissolute way with *dirty* speech (*paroles dishonnestes*).

In short, his love-making must be refined (*de bonne manière*) as well as licit and honourable.

But the husband's art of love must extend further than the sexual act. By *his general* attitude toward his wife and daily treatment of her he must constantly prove his love and esteem for her. Thus in the husband's rules of conduct the very first rule is that he must not wrong his wife and must treat her not as a servant but as his partner: 'The wife is his companion (*compaigne*), not his servant.' Another rule is that he must demonstrate his love and respect by limiting his sexual activity to her alone, and if he does not he does wrong—does wrong, it is noted, because he thereby violates the love he should have for his wife. Not so much the fact of the wrong, but the reason why there is wrong is what Oresme seems to be stressing.

Both the author and his commentator are one with the tradition of the centuries in holding that the husband is the master of the household and head of his wife. He is to rule and instruct her, and she is to obey. But even here Oresme insists that the wife's obedience and goodness will be secured only to the extent that her husband proves his love and reverence for her. So in the fourth chapter of the second book which proposes to show 'how and by what rules the husband should act so that his wife may be good', the first rule is fidelity:

*Text:* For an honourable woman it is a very great honour if she sees that her husband keeps chaste for her sake....

*Gloss:* For he is obliged to do so, as has been said, and in this he does her very great honour.

*Text:* And if he cares for no woman as much as he cares for her and holds her above all others as his very own (*propre*) his beloved (*amie*) and his loyal and faithful spouse . . . .

*Text:* For if the wife knows and sees (*cognoist et apparcoit*) that her husband loves her and is for her, and that he treats her loyally and justly, she in turn will study to be loyal and just with him.

*Text :* And nothing does a woman value more from her husband than his honourable and faithful companionship.

*Gloss:* And thus if she is robbed of it she becomes sorrowful and troubled and cares less about other things, and thus the home falls to ruin.

And, our commentator adds by way of conclusion to this particular chapter, the husband must be even more careful about his fidelity than the wife about hers:

*Gloss:* It is a very great villainy that is done to a man when one can say that his mother was not chaste. But a man must be more virtuous than a woman. Thus, according to truth and reason, it is an even greater reproach when it can be said that one's father kept neither faith nor loyalty with his mother, but was promiscuous (*un ribaut*).

Oresme, however, is really not much interested in whose virtue, or fall from virtue, is the greater. His chief concern by far is the love and friendship between husband and wife and the equality born, and required, therein; and if grades of perfection are to be measured then each should regard the *other* as the better:

*Gloss:* For it is possible that one surpass the other in some virtue and is surpassed in another. Therefore, let each consider the other as the better; and let the man think that his wife does him greater good than he does her, and let her think the same with respect to him.

It would be difficult to conceive a more integrated doctrine of marriage than that set forth in Oresme's commentary. Marriage, love, and sex are all of a piece, and all is good. The union between man and woman in marriage is fully natural. It is meant to spring from love and to be grounded upon love—a love that is both physical and spiritual, that is productive of an intensity of joy and pleasure, that makes equals of a man and woman and makes each to be supreme in the other's affections. The marriage act is good if decently and lovingly engaged in. It has purposes beyond generation: it preserves fidelity and deepens and intensifies the love between husband and wife. Sin may enter into the union, but if the union is of reason and is basically good, there is no need to worry about it. It is only when love becomes 'bestial'—when one is intent only upon his isolated pleasure—that there is cause for concern. Marriage is for children, but it is first and foremost for husband and wife and their mutual fullness of love and lasting fidelity.

Had Noonan known of him, Oresme assuredly would have appeared in his history, but as a maverick—a lone and ineffectual voice in a hostile theological world. But it may be observed that Oresme did not think of himself (in this matter of marriage) as such, nor was he, apparently, so regarded by his contemporaries. There is nothing of polemics in his commentary, his arguments are drawn from Scripture and the secular wisdom of the classical past, and the very book he expounds—itsself remarkably 'modern' in its doctrine—is one that had long been respected, and commented upon, by some of the greatest of the late medieval theologians.

This of course is no absolute warranty against Oresme's originality. Medieval theologians were adept at easing their opinions into circulation by couching them in an abundance of Scripture and classical reference; and it is notorious that not everybody's Aristotle was like everybody else's; and one might be most original while appearing least polemical (witness, for example, St Thomas Aquinas).

Still, the open and theologically knowledgeable historian will not have to search far, or long, before discovering that Oresme was writing his comments on marriage within a prominent, unquestionably orthodox tradition. He simply spelled out for the layman in the warm French vernacular what some of the greatest of his contemporaries and near-contemporaries had written for the professional theologian in the more coldly scientific and technical Latin of the schools, and what the Church was for long widely inculcating in and through the poetry of her nuptial liturgy.

Take Oresme's emphasis upon the bond between husband and wife precisely as a love bond and as the most important element in marriage. Of the marriage goods distinguished by medieval theologians—fidelity, progeny, the *sacramentum*—it was the last which was commonly given the edge over the other two: fidelity and progeny were what marriage *intended*, but the *sacramentum*, which was defined as the indissoluble bond between husband and wife as reflective of the love of Christ for the Church, was what marriage *is*. In true scholastic form, Albert the Great maintained that from different points of view each of the goods may be regarded as supreme. Others—Alexander of Hales, Bonaventure, Aquinas, Scotus, etc. were a little less democratic: whatever the respective values of fidelity and progeny, it is the *sacramentum* that is 'more essential' to marriage and the 'more principal' of its goods.

That they were thinking of the bond precisely as a love bond is evident from their linking it with the love of Christ for the Church, and from their insistence that both marriage and the marriage act be grounded in charity in order that they be meritorious. But they are likewise clear as to their appreciation of the natural, carnal element in the bond.

Thus in the thirteenth-century *Summa* of Alexander of Hales—which, it is essential to note, was not the work of a single, rare 'liberal' theologian (so Noonan regards Alexander of Hales) but is a compilation by many theologians representing, as Gilson points out, 'the spirit of the Franciscan thirteenth-century school of theology at the University of Paris [6] —an objection is raised against the appropriateness of the derivation of human kind from a single ancestor.



Such a derivation (it is argued) only serves to increase the intensity of carnal love which is an impediment to spiritual love. In reply, three kinds of love are distinguished: carnal, natural, and spiritual. Natural love, or carnal love purged of all lust (*amor carnalis . . . nullo modo libidosus*), is no obstacle to spiritual love; on the contrary, it is through natural love that spiritual love should come to be (*per naturalem amorem induceretur spiritualis*), and natural love is meant in turn to be perfected (*perficiendus*) by the spiritual love toward which it disposes (*disponit*).

In this question of our common origin the love treated is not specifically sexual love, but rather the more generalized love of all men for one another — although the reference to lust (*libido*) suggests that sexual love was by no means excluded from the author's (or rather authors') present consideration. The specific type of sexual love, however, receives direct and explicit treatment in a following question: 'Whether the woman should have been formed as a helpmate for man?' The answer is affirmative, and four substantiating reasons are given according to the traditional fourfold meaning of the Scriptures:

(1) the *literal* value of a female helpmate for man is the consequent avoidance of 'the confusion of the sexes' which, as evidenced in the case of the hermaphrodite, nature abhors;

(2) the *moral* value is 'that man might be instructed thereby in the exercise of humility and charity, for seeing himself in need of the other he learns to humble himself, while seeing the other in need of him he strives to be charitable and liberal';

(3) the *allegorical* value lies in the supernatural symbolism thus made possible: 'in the distinction of the sexes and their consequent meeting in carnal union (*in carnis unitatem*)' there is signified 'the union of Christ and the Church';

(4) and the *anagogical* value—'that in that loving embrace (*amicabili coniunctione*) of a man and a woman there might be symbolized the union of the soul with God both as to the intensity of that union (*magnitudo adhaerentiae*) and its fruitfulness (*fructus foecunditatis*). . . . '

Here, as elsewhere, the *Summa* seems to be all for love, the fullness of love between a man and a woman—a love that involves both spirit and flesh, a need-love (promoting humility) as well as a gift-love (promoting charity), a love, moreover, that is based on the equality of man and woman (which the *Summa* develops more fully elsewhere), for there is *mutual* need and help.

One of the likely contributors to the *Summa of Brother Alexander* was St Bonaventure. In his own proper work we find the same respect for and emphasis upon the natural bond of love between husband and wife. In answer to the question as to the propriety of Eve's having been formed from a rib of Adam's side, he writes:

Man and woman, according to the nature and properties of their respective sexes, were so made that they might be united to one another and thus have rest and support in and through each other. Because, therefore, man and woman are joined to each other by a strong and singular bond (*forti vinculo et singulari*), one sex was produced from another. Because that union gives man rest (*dat viro quietationem*) the woman was taken from man while he slept. Because a man is a woman's strength and support it is said that the woman was made from his bone. And because in all these things there is a certain equality in a shared society (*quaedam aequalitas mutuae societatis*), the woman was taken not from any old bone, but from the man's rib and from his side.

Note that in this first moment of the formation of woman all that is envisaged is the relationship of the man and the woman to each other; no external considerations are allowed to impinge. The woman is not seen as having been produced for the sake of procreation or for society at large or even for the Kingdom of God; rather she is viewed as being for her man, as he is for her. As for Oresme and, as we shall see, for St Thomas too, so for St Bonaventure the prime social relationship, the very first and best love, under God, is that between a man and his wife. And this love remains a natural and a naturally intense one even when informed by the Christian *caritas*—or rather, especially when so informed—as appears for instance from St Bonaventure's defence of the exclusiveness of the conjugal bond:

In marriage there is a certain exclusive love (*amor singularis*) in which another does not share. Whence it is that naturally a man is jealous with regard to his wife, wanting her to love no other in that act [i.e. the act of intercourse] as she loves him; and every wife is similarly jealous with regard to her husband . . . .

Likewise, when charity accrues, which makes all things to be common, it never makes one's wife to be common, because of the private love (*privatum amorem*) that must be in marriage, which is, indeed, the sacrament of that love by which one's spirit is so inflamed that he wants no one to be loved as much as he. So also the soul in no way wants to be deserted by God because of any other.

The moral manuals of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, such as the popular *Ayenbite of Inwit* and the *Book of Vices and Virtues*, show a similar appreciation for marriage as fundamentally and principally a bond of love, carnal as well as spiritual; and they locate that love in the context of the virtue of chastity, which Noonan believes (somehow) was the fifteenth-century Martin le Maistre's original development. Thus the *Book of Vices and Virtues*:

The third branch [of chastity] is the state and the bond of marriage, for they [husband and wife] shall keep themselves entirely for each other, cleanly and truly, without any wrong-doing the one to the other; and the law of marriage demands that the one keep truth and faith in body to the other. For after they have been knit together in flesh, they are all one body and one soul, and as wholly as they are one body, they should be of one heart by true love, nor ever separate in heart or body while they live.

Nowhere, however, does the idea of marriage as a bond of full and perfect love emerge more strikingly or more beautifully than from the thirteenth-to-fifteenth-century nuptial liturgy:

Lo, brethren, we are come here today before God and his angels and all his saints, in the face and presence of our mother holy Church, for to couple and to knit these two bodies together, that is to say, of this man and of this woman, that they be from this time forth but one body and two souls in the faith and law of God and holy Church, for to deserve everlasting life, whatsoever they have done here before.

So begins the fourteenth-century nuptial rite of 'the great Church of York'. Similar introductory words were designated for other marriage liturgies of the time. In the liturgy of the diocese of Hereford, for example, the priest is directed to announce to the bride and groom 'the law of marriage' (*lex conjugii*), 'namely, that they will be two in one flesh, and that each be subject to the other (*uterque alteri obnoxius sit*), keeping one another in sickness and in health, and for no cause can they be separated'.

The couple are asked if they will 'love and worship' each other 'to thy life's end', and they promise 'to have and to hold' each other 'till death us depart'. There is the ring ceremony, with the directive that the ring is to be placed on the fourth finger because in that finger 'there is a vein that reaches into the heart'. This rubric appears in many of the rites. And there is good evidence that the priest verbalized this symbolism to bride and groom and congregation, for in an early fifteenth-century marriage sermon we read:

For this cause is the ring put and set by the husband upon the fourth finger of the woman, for to show that a true love and precordial affection must be between them. Cause why, as doctors say, there is a vein coming from the heart of a woman to the fourth finger; and therefore the ring is put on the same finger, that she should keep unity and love with him, and he with her.

The marriage complete, the wedding is brought into the church (having begun outside before the church door) and the couple stand within the sanctuary for the Mass of the Holy Trinity. And another preacher of the time suggests in his marriage homily why the nuptial Mass is that of the Trinity:

Wherefore, ye sovereigns, at this time being disposed in mind and will by one consent through the means of perfect love, ground and beginner of all virtues, to receive this blessed sacrament of matrimony, I shall say to you at this time as Christ said to his disciples: *Estote perfecti sicut pater vester celestis perfectus est*—be ye perfect in body and soul as your father in heaven, almighty God, is perfect. The father of heaven is so perfect that no strangeness of mankind will cause him to withdraw the sun-beams from the heart; and he makes the sun to do his office and to shine both upon those that are good and upon those that are otherwise disposed.

So in like manner ye two sovereigns at this time. Stable yourselves so steadfastly in love that neither word, nor language, countenance nor deed make you to withdraw the beams of perfect love as long as ye live together, for love is the beginner and ground of this blessed sacrament of matrimony.

As the father of heaven is so perfect that the father and the son and the holy ghost are three persons and one god, so that in these three persons resteth unity and oneness in all their works, likewise ye sovereigns at this time by means of this blessed sacrament be ye perfect as long as ye shall naturally live together. As ye shall be one in body, flesh, and in blood, likewise to be steadfast and perfect with oneness in love in your souls . . . .

At communion time the husband goes up to the altar and receives the kiss of peace from the celebrant and returns and is directed to give it 'to his bride alone, and she to him alone'. At the end Mass, 'because of the solemnity of this sacrament', the bride and groom are blessed with the chalice. And in the evening the ecclesiastical ceremonies are brought to a close with the blessing of the bridal chamber and bed.

It may be noted that little reference is made in the western liturgies of the late medieval world to the procreative purpose of marriage. That purpose is certainly there, as part of the total love vowed between the man and the woman. In the nuptial blessing, then as now, as it is prayed that the wife be as loving and beloved to her man as was Rachel to hers, so it is prayed that she see 'the children of her children unto the third and fourth generation'. But the emphasis throughout is on the 'young ones' (*adolescentes*) there plighting their troth and on the love that is bonded between them—the love that is 'the beginner and ground of this blessed sacrament of matrimony'.

The liturgy is thus one with the theology of the *sacramentum*, and together liturgy and theology may be seen to have formed the climate in which a man like Nicole Oresme might confidently express his 'modern' ideas on marriage, long before Martin le Maistre expressed his. The present paper has not considered the medieval casuistry on the conjugal act—its motivation, for instance, and the place of pleasure therein. This is reserved for another article in which the marriage doctrine of St Thomas will be detailed. But perhaps the present sketch may serve at least to suggest that whatever the fine points of the casuistry may have been, the general doctrine of the goodness of marriage and the need that it be grounded in a fullness of love was sufficiently clear and forceful as to enable an honest Christian couple to make love without scrupulous concern over the details of their motivation and the pleasure they would experience.

As good an indication as any as to how the people of the time in general understood, or *could* have understood, the Church's doctrine on marriage and love-making within marriage may be found in that very fine, unquestionably orthodox fourteenth-century English poem, *Cleanness* (or *Purity*). Here we are made to feel all the harsh severity of the medieval Church against sins of lust: unnatural vice, adultery, fornication. But in the midst of all this sombre jeremiad, conjugal sexual love emerges unscathed, as God himself speaks and explains its rationale:

I set them a natural power and secretly taught them its use,  
And held it in mine ordinance singularly dear,  
And placed love therein, the sweetest of joys,  
And the play of passion I depicted myself,  
And made thereto a manner merrier than any other,  
When two true ones had tied them together:  
Between a man and his mate such mirth should come  
Well nigh pure paradise might prove no better;  
Providing they hold each other in honest wise.

# Love and Marriage in the Middle Ages

## Part 2

As John Noonan reads him, Thomas Aquinas is Aristotelian in everything except his sexology, in which he reverts to the rigours of the traditional Augustinianism. For the Angelic Doctor as for Augustine the marriage act is not a product of love and is not to be motivated by a desire for pleasure; it is justified only in its purpose of multiplying mankind. Noonan concedes (briefly, and reluctantly: 'A case can be made . . .', he says) that late medieval theologians, Thomas included, were 'somewhat in advance of their society in their declarations on the ideal of married love', but, he adds and emphasizes, they failed 'to incorporate love into the purposes of marital intercourse'. (*Contraception*, Mentor ed., pp. 299-311.)

The purpose of this article is to summarize St Thomas's doctrine on marriage; to show that he did indeed teach that love and marriage go together, and did also teach that love-human, passionate, pleasurable love—not only entered into the purposes of the marriage act but was also the root and source of the act's ultimate beneficial value for the spouses.

St Thomas's reflections on love and marriage are found scattered here and there through his vast *opera*, but his teaching appears in full and concentrated form in his *Commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard*, Book IV, lists. xxvi-xlii. This early teaching of St Thomas was, in the middle of the fourteenth century, incorporated into a *Supplement* to the *Summa Theologiae* by an unknown Dominican friar in an attempt to complete the Saint's master work. Accordingly, it is these two *loci* that have served as the present paper's principal sources. But the *Summa Theologiae* itself together with that other great work of Thomas's maturity, the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, have also been called in evidence, for in these Thomas's doctrine on marriage is rounded out, deepened, and detailed. Questions left unanswered or undeveloped in the earlier, *ex professo* treatment of marriage are resolved when, in later tracts, charity, passion, love (*amor*), justice—all integral to the question of marriage—are each dealt with singly and in fullness of detail.

It is in the broad metaphysical and theological context of God and the universe that St Thomas treats of human love in general and as it is realized in marriage. The pattern is similar in the *Summae* and *Commentaria* of other medieval scholastics. There is an infinite God and a finite world. Within God there is a Trinity of Persons and 'beyond' God—but created, loved, supported, and directed by him—there is a universe of things, people, events, actions, institutions, and all is hierarchically ordered, though the order is often veiled in mystery. As part of this whole, as an instinct implanted by God and reflective of what is deepest in him, created love or desire of whatever sort is fundamentally good, and human love in particular is very good. Thus St Thomas argues that there is love (*amor*) in God from, of course, St John's *Deus caritas est*, but also by an argument that notes love to be the very first movement of the will, the 'prime root' of every other stirring of appetite (*S.T.*, 1a, 20, 1). Echoing an ancient and common theological tradition, he affirms that there is a 'vestige' of the Trinity in everything created, but especially in the rational creature in whom, as in the godhead, there is an intellectual awareness (*verbum conceptum*) and a consequent love (*amor procedens*) that reflects the Holy Spirit (1a, 45, 7). He asks if man's every desire is toward his ultimate end. The reply is affirmative, for whatever else a man may consciously desire is but a beginning (*inchoatio*) of the total perfection to be found in the final good, which in fact is God (1a 2ac, 1, 6).

But St Thomas, as much as some and more than most of his contemporaries, also viewed conjugal love in the less general, more immediate context of *natura*. The very first question he asks in his long treatise on marriage is: 'Whether marriage is natural?' (*S.T.*, suppl., 41, 1). The fact that it is the first question illustrates Thomas's all-pervading respect for the natural, and would have served to warn his medieval readers of the paramount importance of giving nature its due in any consideration of conjugal living. In his affirmative response Thomas first invokes the authority of Aristotle: man, says the Philosopher, is 'more naturally conjugal than political'. The argument proper explains and elaborates. First, since nature 'inclines' not just to the generation of the human species but also to the preservation, education, and advancement of the child to full maturity, man and woman are meant to live together in a permanent union, which, accordingly, is likewise of nature. Secondly, man and woman are by nature complementary, owe to each other a mutual service and obedience (*mutuum obsequium*), since neither alone is capable of coping with the large and varied business of living in which 'some matters are in the competence of men and others of women'. And, it is emphasized, it is this determinate union of the sexes, their communal life together, 'that makes for marriage'.

In the Thomistic doctrine, therefore, the root relationship in the body politic is the 'community' (*obligatio, associatio*) of husband and wife in 'mutual service'. Out of this relationship grows that between parents and children, out of which in turn grow the complex relationships that constitute society at large.

This is the order required by nature. It is also for Thomas the order of grace. When speaking specifically of Christian marriage he asks whether the *sacramentum*—the indissoluble union itself between husband and wife as reflective of the love bond between Christ and the Church—is principal among the marriage goods, his answer is that though in one sense progeny and fidelity are of prime importance (they are what marriage 'intends'), the *sacramentum* is more noble (*dignius*) than either of the other two and, with respect to marriage as such (*secundum se*), it is more essential (*essentialius*). The first of the marriage goods (offspring), he says, 'belongs to marriage insofar as man is animal, the second (fidelity or mutual service) insofar as man is human, and the third (*sacramentum*) insofar as he is Christian' (*S.T.*, suppl., 49, 3; suppl. 65, 1). This, as has been indicated in a previous article, is a common teaching among the great scholastics and is reflected in the contemporary nuptial liturgy. It is a point overlooked by many of the critics of the medieval theology on marriage who, consequently, view that theology as justifying marriage only in its procreative intention.

Certainly there is heavy stress placed by St Thomas, as by the other medieval theologians, on the *bonum prolis*, and it ever remains for him the chief (though never the only) *end* of marriage; but such stress does not preclude his further and perhaps larger emphasis upon the bond between the spouses themselves. Husband and wife are first and fundamentally for one another, though in and through their union they must also be for their children and for society.

This community or *sacramentum* between husband and wife is a matter of both justice and love, says St Thomas. Here again the modern critic of the medieval marriage theology is found wanting. F. Schlösser, for instance, claims that for medieval theologians generally, the conjugal union was merely a matter of justice. One might think, he says, that the *bonum sacramenti* left room for a mutual *love* between spouses. Not so, for according to St Augustine, who had originated the idea of the marriage goods, husband and wife were to love each other, not as spouses, but as creatures of God; and Schlösser cites the appropriate text. Then he suggests that perhaps the *bonum fidei* (fidelity) might have served the interests of love. Again, not so; and this time he recalls that even for so late a theologian as St Thomas *fides* as referring to the faithful union of husband and wife belonged, not to the virtue of charity or love, but to the virtue of justice (*Andreas Capellanus . . .*, Bonn, 1960, p. 266).



But this is to presume that the medieval theologian's thinking was dichotomous, whereas in fact it was extraordinarily synthetic—the kind of thinking that could produce the great summations and encyclopedias of learning and experience that proliferated through the late medieval world and create such massive poems as *Le Roman de la Rose* and *Les Echechs Amoureux*. Thus, if St Thomas says that fidelity belongs to the virtue of justice, he is not thereby excluding the presence of charity or love.

On the contrary, for him, just as the natural and supernatural, though radically distinct and worlds apart, are nevertheless inseparable in the history of every man, so also, though there is a multiplicity of different virtues, in concrete human activity every virtue presupposes and requires every other; and this, notes Thomas, is not his own private opinion, but is held by almost everyone (*ut fere ab omnibus ponitur*) (*S.T.*, Ia 2ae, 65, 1). For Thomas, then, as for his contemporaries, if there is to be in marriage the Supernatural or grace, there must also be, and be left intact, the natural; and if there is to be true justice in the union between husband and wife there must also be love.

Why St Thomas prefers to think of conjugal fidelity specifically in terms of justice rather than of love is understandable, for marriage yesterday and today, Christian and non-Christian, has always been regarded distinctively as *a contract* involving the exchange of bodies and material goods, an exchange which for the good of society and the security of the spouses must be rooted in objective justice over and above subjective love.

But it is also understandable in terms of love itself. Before marriage a man and woman might simply love each other for a day, a month, a year. But if their love reaches sufficient depth it itself will want to continue till their life's end (and beyond), and will seek assurance that it might. This is the moment of marriage, in which quite freely, quite willingly, the two lovers *swear* to be faithful to each other 'till death do them part'.

That St Thomas did in fact, and quite explicitly, teach the need and worth of love in marriage is amply evidenced. Consider this passage from the *Contra Gentiles* (iii, 123), where the question concerns the indissolubility of marriage:

The greater friendship is, the stronger and more lasting it is. But between a man and a woman there seems to be the greatest friendship; for they are united not only in the act of intercourse, which even among the animals produces a certain sweet society, but also throughout the whole of domestic living. In sign of this it is said in Genesis, ii, that 'for the sake of his wife a man leaves father and mother'. Thus it is fitting that marriage be altogether indissoluble.

Here not just friendship (or love, for—as noted in my previous article—in the Middle Ages *amicitia* was definitely a matter of love, and often of passionate, emotional love) but 'the greatest friendship' is postulated between husband and wife and it is quite definitely considered to involve the love act and all the 'sweetness' thereof. And it is on the basis of this friendship, and not from the point of view of justice this time, that St Thomas concludes that marriage must be indissoluble. Fidelity unto death is seen as a product of a great *love*.

In this same question of the *Contra Gentiles* another argument is presented linking love and fidelity. It is, to be sure, the same argument, only in reverse. If love of itself tends toward indissolubility, indissolubility quickens and confirms love: 'For so the love of the one for the other will be the more faithful, since they know they are indivisibly united.' Lovers, Thomas believes, want to be bound (in justice) to each other precisely because they feel such a bond will preserve and deepen their love.

In the following question (124), which outlines the arguments for monogamous marriage, the theme of conjugal *love* is pursued, and enlarged, for the note of equality is introduced. 'The love of friendship comprises a certain equality.' But, observes Thomas, where one man has several wives 'the love between husband and wife is not free but, as it were, slavish'. In such marriages 'wives are treated as though they were servants'. Further, 'intense love cannot be exercised toward many'. Thus, the man who has several wives while they have only the one husband cannot love them as much as they love him. Consequently, the love between husband and wife 'will not be the friendship of equals. . . but a kind of servility'. The presuppositions are obvious and significant: there is to be an 'intense love' (*amicitia intensa*) between husband and wife; it should be a love that is free and equal (*liberalis, equalis*); and accordingly the wife is not to be treated as a servant (*ancillariter*).

What is meant here by 'intense love' may be gathered from the detailed treatment of human passion in the *Summa Theologiae* (Ia 2ae, 26-28).

Love, says Thomas, is manifestly a passion, since it affects the physical, concupiscible appetite, though it is also, *extenso nomine*, said to be lodged in the spiritual faculty of will. It is the first and most basic passion, and is the underlying motive of all that a person does, even when his action quite visibly emanates from another, even opposing passion, for 'every action that proceeds from any passion, proceeds also from love, as from a first cause'. The lover is in the one loved who is likewise in the lover. One who loves is not satisfied with a mere superficial knowledge of the beloved but 'strives to search within for a knowledge of everything about him, and so enters into the depths of him'. Ecstasy is a product of love: intense meditation upon the beloved distracts the lover, 'draws him away from other things', and to the extent that it is a love of friendship, i.e. other-directed, the ecstasy is even more complete, for then the lover is entirely (*simpliciter*) outside himself, being entirely within the beloved. Jealousy (*zelus*) is also an effect of love, for 'intense love seeks to exclude all that which is hostile to it', and the love of friendship sets a man 'against everything that is inimical to the good of one's friend'. And the love-passion, when its objective is right, far from being harmful to the lover, is perfective of him: 'Nothing . . . which is adapted to that which suits it is harmed thereby; rather, if it is possible, it is bettered and perfected.'

All of this is in the context of a purely natural love, which has St Thomas's approval and respect. It cannot be argued—as it has been argued when mystics like Bernard of Clairvaux and Gerard de Liège are in question—that Thomas is using the fervent language of love because he is really thinking of God.

As a matter of fact, whereas the mystics take over the notions of natural love and apply them to mystical love, Thomas, especially in his response concerning the perfective power of love where he expressly uses the language of the *Song of Songs*, does just the opposite: like many a troubadour and courtly poet of his own time, he adapts the language of the mystics to natural love. When he describes love as *a liquefactio*, i.e. a melting or softening of the heart in preparation for the entrance of the lover; when he speaks of enjoyment or pleasure (*delectatio, fruitio*) experienced in the presence and possession of the beloved; when he refers to the languishment (*languor*) caused by the absence of the beloved and the intense desire (*fervour*) to have and to hold him—he is thinking of human love, pure and simple. In other words, the conversion is not from earth to heaven, as with the mystics, but from heaven to earth, as with the poets of secular love.

The context of the question, and the tenor as well as content of the reply, will allow for no other judgment. The appreciation is for human love precisely as such.

Further, when Thomas speaks of the love-passion as perfective of the lover he has in mind moral as well as aesthetic perfection. This is clear from his response to a question concerning human passion in general (1a 2ae, 24, 3). He asks: 'Whether passion increases or diminishes the goodness or malice of an act?' And he replies: 'As . . . it is better when a man both wills good and by act accomplishes it, so it is of the perfection of moral goodness for a man to be moved to good not only in his will but also in his sensitive appetite, as Psalm 92 has it: "Both my heart and my flesh have joyed in the living God", where heart stands for intellective appetite or will, and flesh for the sensitive'.

In answer to the objection that passion must be harmful since it impedes the judgment of reason, Thomas grants that, if passion 'precedes' reason, then it 'diminishes' (not necessarily destroys) the moral goodness of the act. But if passion follows reason (*se habet consequenter*), then it is both sign and cause of deeper moral worth. As we shall presently see, St Thomas in reply to another question concerning human passion will exonerate the most ardent passions and pleasure in the very love act of husband and wife. But here the implication is clear: it is better for a man to love his wife with his flesh as well as his spirit, with passion as well as will, since by *reason* of lawful marriage he has 'antecedently' judged that she is right and good for him.

In light of his golden rule that grace does not destroy but perfects nature, the naturalness and human quality of conjugal love are maintained as St Thomas considers the effects and demands of the specifically Christian *caritas* (*S.T.*, 2a 2ae, 26, 7).

In reply to a question asking if we should love those nearer to us (because of some natural bond) with greater charity, he argues that those who are not naturally united to us we are the friends of 'simply' by the friendship of charity; but for those who are naturally one with us we have other kinds of love, and these natural loves, if they be 'honest', charity draws to itself, not by absorbing them, much less by cancelling them out, but by 'imperating' or commanding them, by summoning them up and taking them into its service. They are left very much intact. Precisely by remaining what they are, they become the loves of charity. Only now they have an added, super-natural objective, but one which by no means eliminates the original natural one; otherwise they would not be the same original loves, and charity would have nothing to 'imperate'.

In this same context (2a 2ae, 26, 11) St Thomas singles out the love of husband and wife as the greatest of these 'imperated' loves. One's parents, he says, are to receive the greater reverential and appreciative love, but the 'more intense' love is to be reserved for one's wife (*intensius diligitur uxor*). Of all the love relationships under God that Thomas treats in his question *de ordine caritatis*—love between fellow-citizens, rulers and subjects, simple friends, children for parents, etc. —at the pinnacle stands conjugal love. There is only one other relationship, not mentioned by Thomas here, that might possibly be conceived of as superior: the love of parent for child. Is it, or should it be, greater than one's love for one's spouse? It is strange that St Thomas does not ask this question. But since the last question he does in fact ask in a series of questions that build toward a summit of love concerns the love of husband and wife, we are left to conclude that for St Thomas this is indeed meant to be the greatest love of them all. The greatest natural love, and therefore the greatest love of charity.

The physical sexual expression of conjugal love is treated by St Thomas in considerable detail, more indeed than the sensibilities of most modern readers might tolerate. But we must remember that Thomas was not writing for a large and popular audience, but for the professional theologian used to and requiring detailed, precision thinking. His first concern is to justify the marriage act in face of the Manichaeian denial (*S.T.*, suppl., 41, 3). In reply to the question 'Whether the act of marriage is always a sin?', he offers three texts from St Paul which he regards as obvious justification of marital intercourse:

'A virgin if she should marry does not sin. . . . I wish young people to marry, to beget children. . . . Let the husband surrender to his wife that which is due to her.' When he expounds this *sed contra* in the *corpus* of the reply proper, he is exceptionally definite and severe on the opposition. Twice he says that it is 'impossible' that the sexual act be universally sinful.

Only those who follow the 'madness' (*insaniam*) of 'the worst of heresies' (*pessima haeresis*) claim that it is. Thomas would (and did, as we shall see) readily admit that the sexual act can, even within marriage, be sinful, but here he declares, what he is soon to prove, namely that in the act a 'mean of virtue' can be found.

In this same question Thomas lists and disposes of all the relevant objections. It is argued that because the conjugal act interrupts one's union with God it is sinful. Thomas replies that though the act may interfere with one's immediate 'contemplative' union with God it need not sever one's habitual union with him 'by grace'.

Another objection states that since the act is evidently shameful (*turpis*) it must be sinful. The reply is that the shame experienced in the act is not due to any 'moral' defect therein but to a disorder resulting from original sin. It is further argued that since the act has to be 'excused' by the marriage goods there must be something sinful about it. Thomas answers that not only do we speak of inordinate or illicit acts as requiring excuse but also those acts that 'appear' to be disordered, and such is the conjugal act therefore, is 'entirely (*ex toto*) excused by reason of the goodness of marriage, so that it is not a sin'. Finally, it is urged that since an excess of passion corrupts virtue, the marriage act, in which passion and pleasure are always in excess, must be sinful. Thomas replies as we would expect from what we have seen of his doctrine on human passion in general:

the excess of passion that corrupts Virtue not only interferes with the act of reason but takes away the order of reason, which the intensity of pleasure in the marriage act does not do, because even if within the act a man is not ordered according to reason, he has been pre-ordered to it by reason.

Elsewhere (*S.T.*, suppl., 49, 4, *ad* 31) a still clearer and more forceful response is given to a similar objection:

Only when the limits of reason are exceeded is passion considered to be immoderate. But the delight experienced in the marriage act, although it be most intense quantitatively speaking, does not exceed the limits prefixed by reason prior to its inception . . . .

By *reason* of marriage the conjugal act is antecedently rectified. Therefore let passion and pleasure therein be 'most intense' (*intensissima*) and the 'act' of reason suspended, still the 'order' and 'limits' of reason are observed, and the act emerges as good and virtuous.

With the Manichees settled, the way lies open for a more positive approach to conjugal sexuality; and so the very next question asked is: 'Whether the marriage act is meritorious?' (suppl., 41, 4). Thomas's full answer to this question is spread out through a number of articles, and our understanding of it depends on a just consideration of the whole of his doctrine on love. His response in the present article is a qualified affirmation. First, the conjugal act is meritorious providing one is in grace and charity; that is, according to Thomas's general doctrine, he must be one with God (*gratia*) and must be disposed in love toward God and man (*caritas*), and, under God, he must love his spouse above all others with both natural and supernatural love (the *ordo caritatis*).

Here the Thomistic teaching on the relevance of love to sexuality is apparent: not only marriage but the marriage act itself is ultimately a matter of love and is of real and lasting value only insofar as it is rooted in and inspired by love. Secondly, the act must be motivated by one or other of two reasons: in order to beget children or to render to the other the love that is due to him. Note that one *or* other of these motives satisfies the requirement for merit: '*vel . . . ut debitum reddat, vel . . . ut proles ... procreetur.*' Both may be present, but need not be. Just as marriage in general is not only for the begetting of children, but is also for the personal good of the spouses themselves, so too the act of marriage is for generation, but is also for the love and well-being of husband and wife.

That the *redditio debiti* here spoken of is a matter of love as well as justice should be evident from what has been noted above concerning the interrelationship of the virtues in the theology of St Thomas and his contemporaries. In the present article it is confirmed by the placement of *caritas* as the source and prime condition of a meritorious conjugal act. Because of our dichotomous dissociation of justice from love we do wrong to transliterate the expression as 'paying one's debt'. A real *translation* is called for, and 'rendering a due love' comes nearer St Thomas's meaning, providing we understand the responsible, obligatory nature of the love he has in mind: it is the *amor amicitiae*, which looks to the needs and desires of the *other*, to what belongs to him or her rather than to oneself.

Not that there may not also be present the *amor concupiscentiae*, i.e. the love of self-fulfilment and self-satisfaction. We have already seen that St Thomas recognizes the place and value of passion and pleasure in the love act. But such self-directed love must not be the *only* motive for the act, and pleasure and self-satisfaction must not be sought for its own sake.

Thus it is in the context of the question, 'Whether a man sins mortally when he knows his wife without intending any of the marriage goods but desires pleasure alone' (suppl., 49, 6), that Thomas offers the reply:

If pleasure is sought beyond the honesty of marriage, as when someone considers his wife not as his wife but merely as a woman, and is prepared to do the same with her even were she not his wife, he sins mortally. Such a one is said to be 'too ardent a lover of his wife', because his ardour overleaps the goods of marriage. If, however, pleasure is sought within the limits of marriage, as when it is sought in none but one's wife, the sin is venial.

Herein is the marriage act vitiated: when one's concern is neither for spouse nor progeny, but when pleasure 'alone' (*solam delectationem*) is 'sought' (*quaeratur*). Here is the lover who loves only himself and is after his own solitary pleasure. He is not interested in society at large, for he has no desire to procreate. He is not concerned for his partner, for he does not consider her person or needs. This is brute, and perhaps brutal sexuality. Such behaviour Thomas tolerates as venially sinful in the man who still has enough love for his spouse as to want to restrict his love-making to her alone. But for the man who has lost all love and consideration for his wife and is prepared in his heart to seek his satisfaction in another woman, the judgment must be severe. Thus again, Thomas offers the *vitatio fornicationis* of St Paul as a meritorious motive for the conjugal act only when one is anxious to satisfy one's spouse so as to keep him (or her) chaste and faithful (suppl., 49, 5).

Then indeed it is not only a meritorious motive but like the *redditio debiti* a morally and seriously compelling one, even, Thomas adds in conformity with a common teaching of his day, when the spouse's desires are, perhaps through modesty or shame, unexpressed: the husband must feel out, 'interpret' the sexual desires of his wife and fulfil them (suppl., 64, 2). But when one uses the act *simply* to guard (as he thinks) his own chastity, then he does wrong, though only slightly so if his desire does not over-reach his wife. In all of the casuistry that marks, and perhaps mars (at least for the modern mentality) much of St Thomas's sexology, his fundamental intention may be grasped, and lauded: to keep husband and wife looking to *each other* in genuine concern and courtesy, and beyond to society and God's kingdom. The 'mutual service', the 'sweet society', the 'love of friendship' that should be in marriage generally, must likewise be realized within the marriage act.

Nor can we say that Thomas is merely medieval in his psychology and morality concerning pleasure as an isolated force in sexual activity; that he was at fault for not having made, as Noonan would have it, the modern 'breakthrough' in which pleasure becomes a justifying motive for the marital act.

I.A. Richards, relying on the authority of Ribot's *Problèmes de psychologie affective* and, of course, his own intelligence and sensitivity in art and literature, speaks of 'the exclusive quest of pleasure for itself' as 'a morbid form of activity and self-destructive': 'Instructed by experience man and animal alike place themselves in circumstances which will arouse desire and so through satisfaction lead to pleasure. The gourmet, the libertine, the aesthete, the mystic do so alike. But when the pleasure which is the result of satisfying the tendency becomes the end pursued rather than the satisfying of the tendency itself, then an *'inversion* of the psychological mechanism' comes about.



In the one case the activity is propagated from below upwards, in the other from above downwards, from the brain to the organic functions.

The result is often an exhaustion of the tendency, 'disillusionment' and the *blasé*, world-wearied attitude. . . . Every activity has its own specific goal. Pleasure very probably ensues in most cases when this goal is reached, but that is a different matter. . . . The orientation of attention is wrong if we put the pleasure in the forefront' (*Principles of Literary Criticism*, A Harvest Book, p. 96).

'The surest way to get pleasure is to forget about it', remarks Charles Bruehl, and he too admonishes against being actuated 'directly by the desire for pleasure', for 'pleasure seeking, when erected into an end, defeats itself, and is of all pursuits the most disappointing in which a man can engage'. Long before Ribot, Richards, Bruehl (and all of us who really think about it), St Thomas knew this. This is why he could speak of pleasure as being a force implanted by God in sexual activity precisely to induce men to give themselves to it (*Contra Gentiles*, iii, 26, 83) and yet deny its validity as the *only* reason for making love and warn against pleasure *seeking* (not pleasure *experiencing*) in love. Love must continually open out into the other; to the extent that it becomes closed off and ingrown it ceases to be love, and takes on the viciousness of lust.

One final criticism of St Thomas's sexology should be met, if only to point out a few important particulars missed by the critics. He, along with medieval theologians generally, is accused of depreciating the worth of marriage and sex by an undue exaltation of virginity and sexual abstinence. It is indeed true that Thomas adheres to the long-standing ecclesiastical tradition that ranked the state of virginity above that of marriage. Yet we must recognize that he held virginity to be a worthier state *not* because of what is *surrendered* therein but because of what the virgin or celibate *aims at*.

In reply to the question as to whether or not virginity is illicit (*S.T.*, Ia 2ae, 152, 2-3) Thomas says that if it is undertaken 'contrary to right reason, as in the case of the man who loathes pleasure (*quasi delectationes secundum se abhorens*)', then it is wrong: it becomes the mark of the 'unfeeling boor' (*insensibilis, quasi agrestis*).

But true virginity (*paia virginitas*) abstains from venereal delight in order that it might be 'the freer for the service of God' (*ut liberius divinae contemplationi vacet . . . ad vacandum rebus divinis*). The same positive motivation is found to underlie the ecclesiastical requirement of periodic sexual abstinence within marriage.

He who abstains from sexual intercourse with his wife because he abhors sex (*detestatur mulierum usum*) sins. Such sin, Thomas says, has no proper name, but falls into the general category of 'insensibility' (2a 2ae, 153, 3, ad 3). But it is required, and is of virtue, for husband and wife to separate for a time for the sake of prayer: 'on days that are set aside as being particularly for worship it is not lawful to *ask* for intercourse (*pelere debitum*)'. Though one must always fulfil the desires of the other whatever the day or hour: 'tenetur unus alteri debitum reddere quocumque tempore et quacumque hora' (suppl., 64, 5-7). But though St Thomas prefers virginity as a state to that of marriage, the latter is allowed to suffer no disparagement in the comparison. Virginity is rarely mentioned in Thomas's 'long process' on marriage—and then only the more clearly and forcefully to secure the worth of marriage. Thus in reply to an objection that the marriage act cannot be meritorious because by it virginity, which is 'praiseworthy', is lost, Thomas argues:

a man can merit in lesser goods and in greater; thus when one leaves aside a lesser good that he might do the greater he is to be praised for having abstained from the less meritorious act (suppl. 41, 4, ad 2).

As noted at the beginning of this paper Thomas shares the worldview of his contemporaries, in which everything, great and small and in-between, has a proper and necessary place. Nothing good is to be despised, but all is rather to be encouraged and promoted for the benefit of all and of the whole. Thus to another objection—this time against the 'sterility' of virginity—Thomas replies:

The multitude of mankind will be secured if some give themselves to the work of generation; but others, abstaining from this, are thus free for the contemplation of divine things unto the beauty and welfare of the whole of mankind. Thus in an army there are those who guard the camp, those who carry the banners, those who fight with the sword. All is an obligation for the whole, but no one person can do everything (*omnia debita sunt multitudini, sed per unum impleri non possunt*) (1a 2ae, 152, 2, ad 1).

Finally, to the argument that since the marriage act (as distinct from virginity) is granted by way of 'indulgence', it is a gift (*beneficium*) and therefore cannot be a means of merit, Thomas significantly replies: 'It is not incongruous that he who uses a "concession" should merit; because the good use of the gifts of God is meritorious' (suppl., 41, 4, ad 3). Marriage and the marriage act are the gifts of God. He, then, who uses them rightly does well, and merits thereby the grace and the Kingdom of Heaven.

## Endnotes

1. *Contraception: A History of its Treatment by Catholic Theologians and Canonists*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1965. Newly published by Mentor-Omega Books, New York and Toronto, 1967.

2. Mentor edition, p. 372.

3. *Le Livre de Yconomique d'Aristotle*, critical edition of French text with English translation and introduction by Albert Douglas Menut, in *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society, New Series*. vol. 47, part 5 (Philadelphia, 1957), p. 796.

4. It is evident from the context throughout that 'friendship' (*amisté*) is very much a matter of *love*. This is true generally in medieval theology and literature. So T. Dunning, for instance, warns that to translate the Latin *amicitia* simply as friendship is to mistranslate it.

5. Menut's translation of the French text. Other translations throughout this paper are my own.

6. *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, London, 1955, p. 327.

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