# **Covenanted Happiness: Love and Commitment in Marriage**

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# Introduction

Progress, Life, and Happiness  
No more than eighty years ago, contraception was rejected by Protestants as well as Catholics, as being gravely contrary to the natural order and dignity of married sexuality [1]. Sixty years ago, divorce was an exceptional phenomenon, and one that carried with it a considerable social stigma. Fifty years ago, abortion was a criminal offence in all countries and in almost all cases; it was moreover something which practically no woman would contemplate.  
The picture looks very different today. Contraception, divorce and abortion are approved by the legislations of almost all countries, and for millions of persons are accepted facts of modern life. If people in Western countries were asked, "Do you regard the legalization of divorce or abortion, or of the sale of contraceptives, as a mark of a progressive society?", the great majority would in all probability answer that they do.  
Many people, then, are prepared today to identify these phenomena as signs of progress. But, on what do they base their opinion? Is it supported by sociological evidence? Is it the result of their having personally thought the matter out in depth? It is not at all clear that it is so.  
Progress is a fine word. But progress can mean all sorts of different things. Is a society progressing because it has acquired the capacity to produce atomic weapons, or its spacecraft can get to Mars or farther, or its citizens can dial Australia direct?... The techniques of warfare may be progressing, the speed of intercontinental or interplanetary communication may be progressing. But - is *man* progressing? That surely is the real question.  
Is man progressing? As should be clear, it is not possible to answer this question without assigning a goal to man, because progress does not mean advancing in any direction (to advance in *any* direction may be actually to lose ground); it means advancing towards a goal, i.e. towards something that one positively wishes to attain, because it seems worth attaining.  
Few people would object to the proposition that man's goal is happiness. What man really wants is not mainly more speed, or more efficiency, or even more money, but more happiness. Is that what he is getting nowadays? Is modern society unquestionably progressing towards greater happiness? Again, it is not all that clear.  
Along with the right to life and liberty, the right to pursue happiness is a precious human right. But just as one can lose one's life or freedom, so one can lose one's happiness, or fail ever to find it - however much one pursues it. One can fail to find it because one does not look for it where it is, or does not look for it in the proper way. There are certain rules for finding happiness, and for keeping it once found; just as there are certain rules for finding and keeping one's freedom, or as there are certain rules for living itself. Life has its rules, and if they are not observed, the result can be a loss of life, or at least the failure to achieve a free or a happy life. Freedom and happiness are ours not absolutely, but conditionally; the condition is that we respect the rules of life.  
Some people just *don't know* these rules, and so they break them out of ignorance. But the rules still operate, and the consequences of breaking them have to be paid. Ignorance can be very costly. An electric current can kill; so can poison: these are not just laws of physics or chemistry, they are truths about the effect of physical or chemical realities on human life. Therefore, they are truths or laws of life itself. A person may not know that a live electricity cable can kill, and so touches one; a person may not be aware that a certain chemical mixture is poisonous, and so drinks it... Such persons may be quite sincere and blameless in their ignorance. But ignorance does not insulate against electricity, and sincerity is no antidote to poison. Certain actions have been performed, actions that contravene a fundamental law of life - the law of survival - and the inevitable consequences must follow.  
Other people *affect* an ignorance which is certainly not intelligent and can hardly be sincere. A person, for instance, may *choose* to ignore the law that demands respect for other people's property, and make off with his neighbor's wallet; another may similarly decide to ignore the law of gravity and step off the top of the Empire State Building, insisting that he has a *right* to a "happy" landing... In these cases, the question whether ignorance is due to affectation, delusion or insincerity, can be shelved, since it will scarcely modify the definitive consequences of such persons' actions, which is that they do not find happiness. One will quite probably find prison. The other will certainly find death. One can of course call prison or death happiness. Some people do. Most people don't.  
One meets other cases still: persons, for instance, who are not so much ignorant of the rules of life as *irritated* by them. They don't "see" why they have to be dictated to by life (by Nature, by God)... They prefer to do the dictating. They want happiness from life; they want it now, and they want it on their own terms. They are determined to live their own life, without having to heed all those complications and bends. But, does the life they live turn out to be a happy life?  
Their attitude is comparable to that of an irritable motorist who suddenly wants to know why the blazes the road isn't straighter, and therefore drives on as if it actually were straight, as if the curves didn't really exist. The result of such driving is pretty obvious. So it is with the person who demands the "right" to find happiness in sex, in drink, in drugs. On they go, on *their* way to happiness. But their way does not lead to happiness. Along that way what they find is not happiness, but obsession or alcoholism or addiction, which are simply forms of slavery. Some people, again, may call slavery happiness. Most people do not.  
All of these people presumably want (or wanted) happiness from life. They are not or were not wrong in wanting it. They were wrong simply in wanting it in the wrong way. They were, one might say, wrong in trying to lay down the conditions of happiness, to dictate those conditions to life itself. We cannot dictate to life as we please, certainly not in the matter of happiness. No one finds happiness on his own terms, but only on the terms on which life gives it. We cannot lay down the terms of happiness. Life itself, with its rules, lays down those terms. If one plays the game, if one accepts the terms, if one obeys the rules, one can have a reasonable hope of happiness. Not otherwise.  
***Marriage and Happiness***  
Now there are certain things to which all of this applies in a very special way. There are realities in life which are specially capable of giving happiness, but not to the person who attempts to bend them, at will, in any way. They are not meant to be bent that way, or to be bent that far. And if they are so bent, they break. They incidentally almost always break their benders with them. Among these realities is the relationship between man and woman, particularly as experienced both in their union in marriage as well as in the family, that is, in the children to whom their union naturally tends.  
As the title of this book is intended to suggest, the happiness that marriage can and should give is rooted in the covenantal and committed nature of married love: "the covenant of conjugal love... is publicly affirmed as unique and exclusive, in order to live in complete fidelity to the plan of God, the Creator. A person's freedom far from being restricted by this fidelity, is secured against every form of subjectivism or relativism and is made a sharer in creative Wisdom" [2]. And a person's happiness, far from being restricted by the covenanted commitment to marriage and the family, is endowed by it with depth, maturity and permanence.  
The first chapters in this book deal with sexuality considered in general, with the approach to marriage, with its nature and ends, and with factors that affect the happiness of husband and wife, in their mutual relations and their understanding and planning of married life. The commitment of husband and wife is of course not just to one another; it is also and especially to their children. And the personal happiness of husband and wife is necessarily interlinked with their children's happiness. Particular attention therefore has been given to the question of divorce which not only splits spouse from spouse, but also of course separates children from parents.  
In two successive chapters we examine the temptation (greatly intensified in our days) of looking on divorce as the easy (the happy?) way out of married difficulties; and argue that a husband or wife, in divorcing, sacrifices far more in terms of real personal happiness - for himself or herself, as well as for the children - than he or she can ever get out of it. The marriage covenant, with its commitment *not* to divorce, places demands on the spouses' love for one another, and especially on their love for their children. But it is a condition of real happiness for all concerned in married and family life.  
Are children a plus or a minus with regards to married happiness? Does contraception help or hinder the growth of married love? We try to ponder these themes; adding some not too frequently made points regarding Natural Family Planning.  
Parents naturally want their children to be happy. Without a well-formed *conscience*, and without true and worthwhile *ideals*, young people are not prepared for life and can never find real or lasting happiness. So we devote two further chapters to considering ways in which parents need to form their children's conscience, from early childhood; and to how, later on, they need to understand and foster their adolescent and christian ideals.  
The happiness of a family can be threatened by softness or selfishness coming from within, but also and very strongly by forces from outside. If parents are committed to building the present and future happiness of their children, the permissiveness of modern society is certainly not their ally. And so we have included some considerations on how parents must help their children realize that if happiness is a prize that can be won or lost, generosity and firmness are necessary if a person is to keep his or her ideals, also in the midst of a permissive society that is largely built on the false proposition that happiness can be had on one's own terms, without self-control or generosity and basically through self-centered living.  
We conclude with two chapters on the impact that truly Christian couples and truly Christian families - couples and families with personality - can and will have on our modern society so weak in ideals and so short in happiness.  
An Appendix on the subject of abortion is included because, apart from the other moral considerations involved, abortion has come to be probably the greatest threat to the peace of mind and happiness, and to the souls, of so many women and girls in today's world.  
In short, we will try to analyze the reasons why married love and family life so often do not seem today to give the happiness that people surely have the right to expect from them, and what needs to be done in order to refind that happiness, and spread it to others.

1. Sexuality and Sexual identity  
   "Why can't a woman be more like a man?", complained Henry Higgins in My Fair Lady. Today he wouldn't be let get away with the remark without some people (not necessarily feminists) retorting: "and why can't a man be more like a woman?" Others might not only reject both complaints, but even question the importance of a man having to be like a man or a woman having to be like a woman. Indeed, if asked, they might be hard put to say what being a man or being a woman properly means, apart from elementary bodily differences. We live in fact in an historical period when sexual differentiation is becoming confused, sexual character is of little value, and sexual identity is in danger of being lost.  
   It is difficult nowadays to talk about sex or sexual roles without appearing to be, or without being labelled as, more sympathetic to men or more sympathetic to women [3]. I am equally sympathetic to both. For the purpose of my present topic, however, I am especially sympathetic to the difference. Vive la différence!: because this difference is in danger of not surviving in our Western societies - except in a minimal physical way, and even that, subject to increased changeability.  
   Sexuality is being de-sexualized in contemporary Western society. It is being reduced to a merely physical relationship and to one which, at that level, is not even truly sexual. The more properly human understanding of sex is being neglected or forgotten, with little or no emphasis on the fact that man and woman should enrich each other, not primarily by the physical coupling of their bodies but by the interaction of their complementary sexual characteristics - of the specific way each has of being human.  
   Paradoxically, the de-sexualization of modern life is particularly obvious in the area of "sexual education". Sex education has followed a line not of development and improvement, but of impoverishment. Having mainly begun at the level of inculcating biological facts, it has become in a certain sense sub-biological, teaching young people how to engage in a physical activity, while avoiding the natural biological consequences. Current "value-free" sexual education prescinds from any philosophy or teleology of sex which can help people understand the "why and wherefore" of sex: its real importance for the enrichment of the person and of society. No education is offered in a true anthropology of sex, which seeks to show how human sexuality differs from mere animal sexuality, to discover and emphasize those sexual traits and values which go beyond the merely physical or physiological. Nor is there any education in the real psychology of sex: knowing not just how to understand this great human reality, but how to "manage" it in practice: to respond to and be realized by its potentials, not to miss them nor to be frustrated by their misuse.  
   We are right to protest the "sex education" being given to young people today in almost all state and many private schools. Our criticism will gain in power however if we insist that what is being given is not just bad sex education; it is not sexual education at all. It is "de-sexing" education. Young people are being educated to become de-sexed individuals, unisex citizens - not men and women. Frustration of true personal development is a main consequence of a unisex culture and education, for a first step in establishing one's human identity and personality lies in the effort to become a man or a woman, as the case may be.  
   The proper humanizing of the person is severely limited, if one does not learn to distinguish and appreciate masculinity and femininity. In undermining the growth of the individual, unisexism has negative effects on society as a whole. In order to be truly human, society needs both men and women. A unisex society is bound to be lacking in character and humanity and, noticeably, in cohesion too.  
   This has particular application to the family, where the basic solidarity of a society is developed. A unisex philosophy makes the building of a real marriage or a real family almost impossible, for the unique experience - conducive to personal happiness and fulfilment - which marital or family relationships promise, is essentially, not accidentally, tied to the difference and complementarity of sexual roles.  
   Sexual complementarity? But, many would ask, does this idea of complementarity between the sexes, or of sexual inter-dependence, not belong to a cultural outlook of the past? Do we not tend today to stress the right of the individual to identify himself or herself and to seek personal fulfilment as he or she wishes, without unnecessary dependencies?  
   Much of our modern world does seem to think of self-identification in terms of the total autonomy of the individual But that idea should be recognized (at least by Christians) for what it is: a recurrence, on a generalized scale, of the original temptation addressed to Adam and Eve. Identify yourself, create for yourself the knowledge of your own destiny, of what is good or bad for it. Create that destiny with no subordination to God or to others (see Veritatis splendor, nos. 35ff). The result of this rebellion against the scheme of creation was to bring disorder into the world, threatening all the aspects of that God-given plan which fosters human development. Sexuality represents a major feature of this divine plan, for a large part of the order of the world is built around the nature and quality of the relation between the sexes. We can understand sexuality correctly or wrongly, a wrong understanding having negative effects on the personal and the social scale. And, today, true sexuality is being radically misunderstood and constantly misused, with the result that it is in danger of extinction, of becoming a lost treasure of mankind.  
   Each sex, a partial image of God  
   What is human sexuality really about? Are the sexes really complementary and inter-dependent? Do man and woman really need each other? And if so, for what? Is their sexual complementarity meant just for procreation? Is it just for establishing a relationship of mutual convenience or satisfaction between man and woman? A proper answer to these questions, it seems to me, shows that sexuality has broader and deeper purposes, with a scope that is richer and more challenging.  
   Sexuality is of God's making, and the key to its understanding lies with God. It is urgent as never before to get back to his design for sex, his plan and purpose, as it clearly appears from the start.  
   "God created man in his own image", we are told in the first chapter of the Book of Genesis (1:27). It is from this being in God's "image" that humanity draws its unique dignity; in it lies the key to human identity, development, and destiny. Genesis, however, has more to say. The text immediately adds: "in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them". Man was created in a dual mode, male and female. So it is together that the two sexes image God. Here lies the special dignity, as well as the fundamental equality, of each sex. Each is a (partial) image of God [4]. Taken together in their complementarity, they give a fuller image. "Man and woman are created, which is to say, have been willed by God: on the one hand, in perfect equality as human persons; on the other, in their respective being as man or woman. 'Being man' or 'being woman' is a reality which is good and willed by God. Man and woman possess an inalienable dignity which comes to them immediately from God their Creator. Man and woman are both with one and the same dignity in "the image" of God" [5].  
   This is manifested in both man and woman and should be discovered by each in their reciprocity and in the various modes in which they should relate. Destroy the true sexual relationship, and man can no longer attain his identity. Pope John Paul II, in his catechesis on human love, says: "the search for the human identity of the one who at the beginning is 'alone', must always pass through duality: 'communion'" [].  
   Sexuality has a natural ordering to the particular communion of marriage, the lifelong union of one man and one woman, with its two inter-linking purposes: the procreation of children as a fruit and expression of marital love; and the development of the spouses as persons.  
   Sexuality is not only for marriage  
   But one must complete the picture. Sexuality is not only for marriage. Even outside the context of marriage, it is a reality which deeply affects - should affect - major aspects of human and social life. While its procreational aspect ensures the future of mankind, its relational aspect is meant also to ensure the present, being a force and factor to humanize social relations. It is not good that man or woman should be alone. Their learning to relate, one to the other, is meant to help each one discover human values - and through them to discover God - by the association of masculinity and femininity [7].  
   Human dignity between man and woman is identical, sexual roles are not; and the attempt to abolish the difference between these roles has highly negative effects on personal, family, social, and religious life.  
   The assignation of specific, distinct, sexual roles to man and woman, or the suggestion that certain human qualities are - or should be - specially characteristic of man and others of woman, is not popular with the unisex mentality. Unisexism tends to see in this an insinuation of priority instead of an assertion of complementarity. However, to attribute a particular quality as more proper to man or to woman is not to suggest that the same quality may not be present also in the other sex. The point is rather that each sex tends to reflect or incarnate certain human, spiritual qualities - so in some way imaging God - which also serve as a model for the other sex to learn from. Complementarity implies that each sex can be a humanizing inspiration and a guide to personal growth and maturity for the other.  
   Traditional sexual psychology and education worked from the idea that man's tendency is to assert and fulfil himself more in the external environment, woman's more in the home. Nowadays this anthropological judgment is not popular. However, it might not be right to reject it out of hand, without weighing its possible deeper implications. After all, such an analysis can be taken to mean that man is more thing-directed or situation-directed, and woman more person-directed [8]. Similarly, if one were to reflect on another frequently made generalization - that man has greater aptitude for the technical aspects of life, and woman for the human aspects - one could say that, if this generalization is valid, woman has a greater capacity than man for humanizing life.  
   I happen to hold this latter view; and therefore, while fully supporting the modern idea that woman must be free to pursue whatever career she chooses in the professional and working world, I firmly believe that both society and woman herself will be the losers if she does not bring her particularly feminine and humanizing talents to those jobs. Her presence, with those talents, in public affairs is all the more urgently needed today, when human values are in danger of being submerged in technology.  
   Sexually characterized relationships  
   Later on, I put forward the suggestion that spouses who avoid the procreational consequences of sex may be impoverishing their marital and sexual relationship. My present concern is rather how all of us can fail to mature and to be enriched, in the process of developing our personal sexual identity and of learning to relate sexually to others in all the modalities of male-female relationships - single person to single; single to married and vice-versa, girlfriend to boyfriend, celibate to the other sex. It is this relational aspect of sex that I wish to consider. Although sexuality and sexual roles affect the whole area of personal growth and social life, I will restrict attention to family sexual relationships: husband-wife, father or mother to son or daughter and vice-versa; brother to sister, and sister to brother. And the treatment will necessarily be summary and incomplete.  
   **Husband and wife**. A man needs to find the woman in his wife; his masculinity should grow in complementary response to her femininity. And a woman needs to find the man in her husband; her femininity should grow in response to his masculinity. So, as each responds to what is complementary in the other, each grows, finds himself or herself, also by growing in sexual identity.  
   The woman in the wife should stimulate the husband sexually; the man in him should stimulate her sexually. Something is seriously wrong with a marriage where the partners are not capable of evoking a sexual response in each other. Why is it, I wonder, that a statement like that tends to make us think just in terms of physical response or bodily arousal? Is this not to reveal an extraordinarily narrowed view of sexuality?  
   Sexuality - sexual character - ought to be a source of continuing motivation and inspiration between husband and wife. It has been said that it is no surprise to see a young couple in love; the surprise is to see an old couple in love. I know many older couples who are very much in love and who certainly are a sexual inspiration to one another. Perhaps their physical relations do not mean so much to them as decades ago, but their sexuality is alive and potent and productive of a more deeply united conjugal love than ever before. The husband's love has been inspired by the development of the woman in the wife, which a lifetime of striving to measure up to the fullness of womanhood has brought about, and, similarly, her love has been inspired by his struggle to be a man.  
   The idea is current that the spouses, rather than regarding one another as different, should simply look at each other as equals. This latter attitude is not enough, for there can never be a truly happy and lasting marriage unless the husband can look up to his wife and admire her for qualities which he may well feel he lacks (or certainly does not possess in equal measure), and unless the wife can look up to her husband and admire him for qualities that come as a strength and an addition to her life.  
   Certainly they can look up to each other for qualities that are in no way sexual: good humour, for instance, or intelligence. If both spouses are very intelligent, this can produce interaction and support, but it may also spark off envy. This can particularly happen if one is more intelligent than the other, and the latter offers no "compensatory" quality in return. As a rule it is not good if husband and wife compete in the same field (the exception being when they compete in giving love to each other). Masculinity and femininity are not meant to compete against each another. One way of explaining this is to say that men and women are not in the same class and therefore should not be in the same race. Another and perhaps better way to put it is to say that they are in the same class and race; not as competitors however, but as team mates, running together. It is man as man who motivates woman to be woman. When a man truly runs as a man, he kindles his wife's admiration; and she, when she runs as a woman, kindles his. Further, the more a woman the wife is, the more she motivates the husband to be a man, and vice-versa. Sexual excellence stimulates emulation. It is as a team that the spouses can win.  
   **Parents and children**. Male and female personality development is essential for family functioning. To be a father, one has to be a man, and not in a physiological or physical sense alone. To be a mother, one has to be a woman. One of the great challenges of married life is the development on the part of the couple from being spouses to being parents. To become (or to avoid becoming) a parent is easy; to be a parent is difficult. Many parents consciously or unconsciously pass up the challenge this poses.  
   Most people seek to have the esteem of others. The esteem which should be most important is that of one's spouse and one's children. A man may strive for the regard of his colleagues, often without getting it or, if he gets it, without keeping it. And all the time he can have it much more easily from his son or daughter. "There's no one like my Dad". It is true that time and close contact put this esteem to the test; and he will have to keep striving to retain it. Yet it is easier to achieve, and more satisfying at a deeper human level, than social or professional esteem. A father should feel the challenge of being a father to his son or daughter. The same applies to mothers, though what each is challenged to is different according to his or her proper sexual role.  
   Children naturally tend to have respect for their parents, although they obviously need parents they can look up to. This respect is closely connected to the fact that they expect something special from their parents, though it should be borne in mind that they do not usually expect, nor should they normally receive, exactly the same from their father as from their mother.  
   When, as seems frequent today, people fear looking up to God or look at him with mistrust, their lives are marked by a loneliness that, if not obvious at the surface, is deeply present underneath. Looking up to God and trusting him is facilitated by having looked up to and trusted one's parents. And conversely, when a person cannot look up to or trust his or her parents, his attitude to God scarcely ever develops adequately.  
   Young people need a father who can in some way incarnate God's fatherliness: trustworthy authority coming from love. They have no less need of a mother who can incarnate God's motherliness: his understanding and support for our weakness, God as our loving refuge [9]. Roles have been badly misunderstood when parents compete to wield authority, but do not compete to give support. There is an instinct in woman to be a comfort and refuge, but many women today are neglecting to develop this instinct and even reject the idea of woman having a special capacity for being supportive, as if to accept it were an admission of woman's weakness, rather than an affirmation that all of us, being weak, need the support that so often only a woman can offer.  
   It is an immense strength to family life when sexual complementarity has been well developed in the parents [10]. Children will be much more likely to bring their problems to parents to whom they have alternative access on different grounds. They are not likely to have much confidence in parents whom they sense to be engaged in a power-struggle.  
   One cannot pass on from this particular theme without noting the widespread loss today of the sense that parenthood is a privilege. Here let me put forward a very tentative impression. One still meets men who are keen on fatherhood, looking forward to becoming a father or proud of being one already. While I may be wrong, I am inclined to think that one meets fewer women who are keen on motherhood; fewer girls who sense that there is a lot of fulfilment in becoming a mother. This, if so, is specially serious to the development of feminine sexual identity.  
   To lose the sense that parenthood constitutes a major means of personal fulfilment is worse in the case of a woman, because the pride of motherhood is of a deeper order than that of fatherhood. Motherhood asks more of woman; the woman gives more of herself in becoming a parent, she has a greater part in bringing about a work of creation [11].  
   Men understand this. Of all the reasons that can make a man feel that a woman is unique, none is deeper than the fact that she is the mother of his children. Yet many women renounce or would reduce this particular claim on their husband's admiration. There is a primary truth of sexuality here which our modern world seems to be losing sight of: if nothing makes a man respect a woman so much as motherhood, this is because motherhood takes her out of the category of an object to be possessed, and introduces her to the category of what should be revered. Sex divorced from its reference to parenthood is robbed of its dimensions of mystery and sacredness; a fact that applies with special force to motherhood. Nowhere else does the mystery and glory of being a woman appear as in her capacity to be a mother. Few men are not stirred by this mystery. Yet today not many women seem to glory in it.  
   **Boyhood and girlhood**. For a child or adolescent to grow into an adult who has achieved proper sexual identity, the passage of the years alone is not enough. Mind and will are constantly involved in the process. Models to be emulated must be before the young person's eyes, particularly at the adolescent stage, and those models must be adequate. It is so important that teenagers have heroes and heroines worth imitating. One wonders what inspiration some current popstars, for instance, offer for sexual development and identification.  
   No boy develops into a man unless he passes through an adolescence where he knows what is proper to a man, learns the challenge of masculinity, and is helped to face up to it. A similar challenge faces girls, who are having a harder time than boys about sexual identity. No girl can develop into a woman without a model or models who set her an example of femininity. True sex education must identify the distinctive qualities of manliness and womanliness, hold up models of them to young people, and seek to evoke a personal and voluntary response in them.  
   Understanding, sensitivity, tenderness, gentleness... Consciously or unconsciously, a man looks for qualities such as these in a woman. If he goes to marriage and does not find them in his wife, disillusionment sets in; the marriage will probably head for a break down. Are girls encouraged today to understand that their ability to relate to others depends on their developing not only human skills, but also feminine sense, feminine character, feminine qualities: that their goal is not to be as masculine as men - that is exactly what marks destructive feminism - but to be as feminine as women? Society at large does not provide girls with this encouragement. Do they find it at school? Most important of all, do they find it at home?  
   ***Education***. The Church has always sought to remind parents that the education of children is not just a matter for the school. On the contrary, the parents themselves are the main educators, not because they will teach their children mathematics or physics, and not only because they can teach them about life in general. But especially because they will teach them certain unique human relationships, the experience of which is a key to a properly integrated social life later on - the family relationships of son to father and mother; of daughter to father and mother; of brother to sister and sister to brother.  
   John Paul II, in Familiaris consortio, says: "In the area of sex, the educational service of parents must aim firmly at a training that is truly and fully personal: for sexuality is an enrichment of the whole person - body, emotions and soul - and it manifests its inmost meaning in leading the person to the gift of self in love" (no. 37).  
   Can one say that boys and girls today are better educated sexually - more aware of what the true human sexual identity and make-up of a boy or girl is, and striving for the qualities that can identify them in their respective sexual role - than in prior years?  
   "Come on, be a man". Most boys and, for that matter, most men, have a clear enough idea of what this means. Boys need to hear it frequently. And usually they are conscious of it whenever they fail to live up to the challenge to act as a man.  
   "Come on, be a woman". How is it that this has never been a common encouragement? Is it because girls in the past were not taught to be women or were afraid to be women? Or could it perhaps be because girls and women up to recently had a more naturally developed sense of their own feminine identity, and it was not so necessary to put to them the challenge of womanhood (which is of course as great a challenge as that of manhood)?  
   Today this challenge needs to be put. Peculiarly enough, the last persons to put it are the radical feminists. It is a significant point. Such feminists would seem to take no joy in what is characteristic of woman; possibly they cannot even identify those characteristics. If they are not challenging women to be women, it is, I think, because they are not proud to be women.  
   Few fathers - as yet - would be afraid to tell their son to be tough or brave, pointing out to them that courage is a manly quality. Yet more mothers today might be reluctant to tell their daughter to be caring or considerate, pointing out that a tender concern for others is a feminine quality. Could it be that they implicitly assume tenderness to be inferior to courage? It seems obvious to me that the two qualities are distinct, and also that one is typically feminine and the other typically masculine. But I certainly do not accept that one is humanly inferior, or less important to personal and social life, than the other.  
   **Sons and daughters toward parents**. As children begin to grow, their response to their parents normally becomes modulated according to the qualities of fatherliness or motherliness that they find. A filial attitude towards parents should be marked by a special type of friendship, based on respect and reverence. If one were to generalize and say that the father evokes more respect and the mother more reverence, here again we are facing an expression of complementarity; only a defective anthropology would wish to debate which attitude is superior [12].  
   One of the main points in the teaching of Saint Josemaría Escrivá on the family is that parents should learn to be friends to their children. This takes a lot of effort, since children's outlook and tastes keep changing quickly, especially in the more critical years of their adolescence; and parents will not be their friends if they are not flexible or agile enough to attune accordingly. If parents attune, children normally keep responding.  
   Probably, as time passes, a son will tend to be closer to his father, and a daughter to her mother. But it is not necessarily so; and not for every type of communication within friendship. Whichever parent is closer to one of the children at a particular moment will often have to help him or her relate better to the other parent. For of course, despite all the efforts of parents, children at times do not respond and keep their distance. Parents who are true men and women, and who love one another, will generally find the way to overcome these passing difficulties.  
   It is normal for a son to have a special reverence for his mother; and, as he grows, also to assume a protecting attitude towards her. Is this an insult to her weakness or a tribute to her femininity? Should we not watch the danger of carping at what we can perhaps be proud of? The same holds for the frequent phenomenon that, as a daughter grows, her father will tend to look to her and not only to his wife for tenderness - a tribute to his fatherly masculinity and to her daughterly femininity.  
   Brothers and sisters.
2. An especially important area is that of the relationship of brothers and sisters between themselves. Samuel Johnson, the great philosopher and scholar of eighteenth century England, who had neither brothers nor sisters, confessed to a friend how he envied those who had, and how amazed he was to see that they appreciated the gift so little and so often let it be spoiled. "We tell the ladies that good wives make good husbands; I believe it is a more certain position that good brothers make good sisters" (Life, I, 198). I agree with Johnson, but think it is even more certain still, and a particular part of God's plan for family life, that good sisters make for good brothers. Few boys can fully get away from the influence of a good sister.  
   The importance of the brother-sister relationship has a social as well as a personal dimension. This is brought out if one adverts to the situation when such a relationship is not possible because, as happens more and more today in our one-child families, there is no sibling to relate to. In the past such situations tended to be the exception; today in many parts of the West they are very close to the rule. Perhaps we have not yet weighed (though we are beginning to experience) the social effects of this lack of natural domestic induction into the experience of fraternity. The danger is increasing that the very term "fraternity" will be left with a purely ideological content, existentially incomprehensible to the majority of persons who, as children and adolescents, never knew what it means to have a brother or sister [13]. Whence will they draw the inspiration or example that can teach them what it means to treat others fraternally?  
   Brothers and sisters naturally tend to fight among themselves, but to defend each other before outsiders. It should be normal for a boy to defend his family: especially his mother and, in a different way, his sisters. This is a sign of manliness, not of superiority. It is a sign of inter-dependence and solidarity [14]. Beneath it all, it is a sign of the greatness of the debt he feels towards them.  
   Here, while I think that sisters today will still defend their brothers, I have a certain impression that brothers are no longer so quick to defend their sisters. If they are losing their natural instinct in this, it is perhaps partly because they are not taught to understand and respect the mystery of girlhood, which a boy can most easily discover in his sister. It is also true that when girls are encouraged to be attractive sexually rather than femininely, they seem to other boys, and even to their brothers, to be renouncing a claim to respect.  
   The relationship between man and woman is meant to be one of mutual enrichment in personhood, not a user-relationship nor a profiteering relationship. We spoke at the start of sexual education. If education is used in its proper meaning of preparation for civilized life, one is sexually uneducated if one has not learned that respect is essential if relations between the sexes are to be human. The same is true if one has not learned that such respect has to be created, and can easily be destroyed. No boy is respected by girls if he is sensed simply to want to use them; and no girl is respected by boys if she lets herself be used.  
   Some girls today seem not to know the difference between making oneself attractive femininely and being provocative sexually. Not to be aware of the nature of the attraction one can exercise, of the difference between being admired and simply being desired, shows a lack of understanding of sexuality - a failure on the girl's part to understand not only male sexuality, but also an element important to her own growth in truly feminine sexual identity. Modesty is something deeply ingrained in a girl's nature, and designed to play no small part in her development as a person. But it can be gradually eroded through the force of fashion or peer pressure, combined with a lack of parental guidance or brotherly advice.  
   A woman's good instincts are a tremendous source of strength. But, as in the case of a man, those good instincts need to be evoked. When St. Josemaría Escrivá, in his conversations with women and girls, touched on this point of feminine sense and feminine modesty, he would often sum up his arguments in one simple formula: "It should be enough for you to be women". His appeal was to authentic femininity. It was a simple call to proper self-identification: to draw from one's inner nature the desire to find one's true identity, also in sexuality, and not to lose that identity under constraint from peers, fashion, or the media.  
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   In conclusion, then, we may say that human sexuality, not only in individual identification (and consequently differentiation) as feminine or masculine, but also in the complementarity between the two, gives an image of God. One cannot say that masculine traits "express" or "image" God more than do feminine; or vice-versa. Each, we repeat, is a partial image. Together, in their mutual complementarity, they form the more complete (though always limited) image God intended.  
   This also means of course that growth in personality and humanity is severely limited unless each person, in becoming fully identified according to his or her proper gender, not only understands but also seeks to imitate and acquire the virtues more "typical" of the other sex. This too enters into the necessary process of sexual identification, for there are masculine modes of living feminine qualities, and feminine modes of living masculine ones. It is an impoverishment for each sex not to understand this and to respond to the challenge it offers.  
   A lack of true masculinity or of true femininity means a lack of human variety and richness. A world which does not encourage men to be more masculine, and women to be more feminine, is not the world as God meant it to be. It is a poorer place for growing up in, for learning to be human, and for finding God imaged in the masterpieces of his visible creation.  
   The relationship between the sexes is thus designed to be a fundamental force for humanizing persons and society: men and boys learning to appreciate, admire, and be enriched by those features that are specially "God-like" in well-developed feminine nature; women and girls similarly coming to a positive and enriching appreciation of those other distinct features, also "images" of God, that appear in true masculinity; and both men and women, through the contrast and the complementarity, acquiring a deeper understanding of life - of its origin, its meaning, and its ultimate end.

Sex and Love before Marriage [1]  
The sexual relationship is a key factor in the normal process by which each man or woman grows to maturity. Sexuality presents itself to the vast majority of people as filled with interest and indeed fascination. It holds out the hope of a special happiness; and yet is so often characterized by tension and strife. It can be colored by idealism, and clouded by obsession. Tending to draw people powerfully together, it can also leave them bitterly separated.  
If sexuality is so important in personal development and in interpersonal relationships, why should it be such a delicate matter to handle, and so filled with complexities and dangers?  
It may help towards unraveling this mystery if we start from the concept of simple friendship, especially as the sexual relationship we wish to consider here implies or should imply a special form of friendship.  
Friendship  
The human person does not grow to maturity (or find happiness) in isolation. One needs to relate to others; and not just to others in general but to some others whom one can regard as friends, whom one can trust in a special way, in whom one finds sympathy, respect, understanding... The tendency to seek friends is universal. Friendship is one of the great blessings of life - that not everyone enjoys. The completely friendless person is at a tremendous disadvantage - with no one to trust in, to communicate and share with... The person without a friend in the world is truly alone and unhappy.  
Why should human persons need to relate between themselves? Why should friendship be the most normal element drawing people together? We go back to the Book of Genesis and to that first divine comment about the human person: 'it is not good for man to be alone' (Gen 2:18). God made him for communion, not for solitude or isolation; not to have just distant acquaintances but some real companion, some real friend.  
Friendship implies love (and love without the essential qualities of friendship is not true love at all). A friend is someone you care for and trust, to whom you wish well and not evil, with whom you can be more at one than with a mere acquaintance, whom you feel appreciates and respects you just as you respect him or her. Friendship usually starts out from a casual acquaintanceship, it grows as one senses oneself understood or complemented by the other, it adds a sense of completeness to one's life, becoming at times a bond that binds to death.  
Young children like to have many friends, though their approach to their friends is often quite self-centered. If it remains so, they will lose their friends since no one (except God and a really good mother or father) loves a selfish person [2]. And since we all have a large measure of selfishness, wanting what seems good for us rather than what is good for others, uncombatted selfishness is radically opposed to any enduring genuine friendship.  
***Friendship in childhood and adolescence***  
In childhood, while there is a certain tendency for boys to associate more with boys and girls more with girls, boys and girls can naturally be good friends. In any case before they get to their teens, they already have a fairly accurate idea of what is implied in friendship - that being able to rely on someone who is not selfish (at least towards you), who doesn't cheat or take advantage of you, with whom you can share your secrets, your trials, your dreams...  
Among pre-teen boys and girls, there is of course a sense of sex difference, but it is not normally an obstacle to genuine friendship between a particular boy and girl - however much each may otherwise join in common peer judgments: all boys are rough and stupid; all girls are soft and silly.  
With adolescence things begin to change. Sexual differences take on a new meaning and importance in interpersonal relationships. An established friendship between two boys or two girls can be tested by jealousy if both friends are interested in the same girl or boy. But why can't both have him or her simply as a second friend [3]? No; it is not felt so. They are discovering that particular sense of possessiveness, of looking for exclusive possession, that now shows itself in the new and perplexing world of sexuality.

Friendship and sexual attraction  
In adolescence incipient sexual attraction is natural and yet puzzling; it is mysterious, holding the promise of something great. In its first adolescent awakening, human sexuality evokes wonder and respect. It tends initially to be filled with admiration, reverence, a desire to please, to be accepted and to give in return. This does not have to disappear but, especially in boys, it will soon have to contend with a powerful new and disturbing factor - a fascination with the body of the other sex, in which there is little of admiration and much of self-centered desire. The stage is set for a battle, the outcome of which determines the sexual balance or imbalance of the person and the quality of the sexual relationships into which he or she will be capable of entering.  
The drama begins when that general boy-girl attraction leads to a more personal interest, to what is felt to be a particular affection. So much depends on what actually follows. In the measure of the nobility of what one feels to be a unique sort of friendship or an incipient love, each will realize that this love is accompanied by a physical attraction in which there is something self-centered and grasping that must be held in check lest selfishness undermine friendship or love.  
It is not so difficult, but it is all-important, for young people to realize the difference between sexual desire and sexual love, between corporal attraction and personal affection. A boy can experience a growing fascination (which can easily become an obsession) with the feminine body in general. He may or may not realize how much he needs to control that fascination. The real test, the moment of truth, comes when he senses that he loves a particular girl. She too has a feminine body, but his love, even if it is no more than a passing friendship, can help him think, I like this girl; I like her too much to want to use her. One doesn't use a friend; one respects him or her [4].  
With this we have formulated a main rule that holds good for friendship, and all the more so for love, and in particular for love between the sexes. True friendship, true love, respects the other. If it wants to take advantage or to use, it is no longer true; it is being corrupted by selfishness.

Love and sex  
Sex is too important a matter in life to be simple. It is one of the most delicate realities we have to handle. It can be broken and, if it gets broken, it can break a life or several lives with it. Few things are more destructive than unregulated sex. This might seem to be a negative or an exaggerated judgment. Is it?  
To think it out, let us put side by side two statements: "sex is good" and "there is nothing wrong with sex". These might seem to be two slightly different ways of saying the same thing. They are not.  
Sex is good. Christianity not only accepts but defends the goodness of sex. But to say that sex is good is not the same as saying 'there is nothing wrong with sex'. That is a very different proposition. It is a proposition that no thinking person can maintain, any more than one can maintain that there is nothing wrong with human nature. Our human nature is good. But there are plenty of things wrong with it. Is there nothing wrong in our reactions of greed or anger or hatred or revenge?... No; whatever the reason (Christians say it is Original Sin), many of our instincts, good in themselves, so easily go wrong, even crazily and wildly wrong. Sex is one of them.  
Sex, in its proper place, has a noble role to play in life, and a noble fulfilment in marriage. Yet sex is not easily kept in its proper place. Its proper place is one subordinated to love, controlled by love. But it takes all the best efforts of love - love for God and human love - to keep sex in its place. The fact is that sex is not easily subordinated to love or to anything. And insubordinate sex tends to be destructive of everything, especially of love.  
Some distinctions  
It can help to see this clearly if one remembers that, contrary to what some people seem to suggest today, sex and love are not the same thing. Far from it. Subordinated to love, as we have just noted, sex has a noble role. But sex that dominates, sex on its own, sex in isolation - what is properly called lust - is anything but noble and is very different to love. Sexual desire after all can be towards any attractive member of the other sex; sexual love is towards one in particular. Further points of contrast quickly suggest themselves:  
- Love is generous; sex is selfish;  
- Love seeks to give; sex, to take;  
- Love wants to please; sex, to have pleasure;  
- Even physically, love is gentle and tender; sex is rough and aggressive.  
We could continue with the contrasts:  
- Sex can be bought; love cannot;  
- Love laughs, is light-hearted; sex is grim and intent;  
- Love opens a person to the good of others; sex closes one up in one's own selfishness;  
- An act expressive of love makes a person feel happy and uplifted; a sexual satisfaction (I repeat, I am speaking of sex isolated from love) leaves behind a sense of sadness and even of degradation.  
So, people can be raised up by sex - by the attraction between the sexes - if they see and live it in the context of God's plan for personal maturity and for human love and marriage. Or people can be pulled down by sex, can become enslaved in selfish desire and so close themselves to the possibility of loving truly or of being truly loved.  
Therefore not all sexual activity shows love or fosters love. We all have a general attraction towards the other sex. But when this attraction becomes particularized towards a concrete person, it is elementary - if one wants to know oneself and to know where one is going - to ask: is this an urge to love, to show my love for someone, or is it an urge to self-seeking and to use someone as a means to that end? If we do not ask this question, then we do not know ourselves and perhaps do not want to know ourselves.  
Attraction and possession  
Sexual attraction can be just bodily; then it is physical desire rather than love for the person. Physical sexual desire needs little or no time for development. It is quickly aroused and seeks immediate satisfaction. It wants possession of the body but involves no real commitment of the heart. It is fickle, it tends to change, it can lead to promiscuity.  
But sexual attraction will also enter into what may be a true love. Now love, if it is to be more than mere infatuation, does need time to develop. It is love not just for the body but more importantly for the person, and the person can only be gradually known. The more a person worth loving is known, the more he or she will be loved. This is a process that necessarily takes time, but does not necessarily work out well. As the person is gradually known, he or she may turn out to be less lovable than one thought. Or as oneself is known, one may be discovered by the other as less lovable...  
We all have defects. Only a vain person thinks he or she has no defects. And, at marriage, only a very superficial or immature person thinks his or her spouse has no defects. Marriage is always a love match between two defective people. That is precisely why enough love has to be there - has to be developed - before marriage, so that one can say, I love him or her with his or her defects, I think he or she loves me with my defects, and I also think that we can make a go of it nevertheless, and be happy together.  
Up to the moment of marrying one is free to make the decision, No, I will not marry this person. This may be because one has discovered too many defects in the other. It may also be because one is too selfish and calculating oneself, and is not prepared to fight one's own defects sufficiently so as to make a go of a marriage with another defective person. Such a decision may be wise, inasmuch as it avoids what would inevitably be an unhappy marriage. Or it may be a huge mistake as missing the only marriage where one's own defective self would be loved by someone else.  
Before marriage, then, there is need for a period over which love can be discerned, and can grow. That period is what is called courtship. The real enemy of growth in love during courtship is not so much defects of character as lack of mutual respect. This is the point we are getting at. Mutual respect, especially in physical sexuality, is the only framework within which love can grow. It is the condition for love to remain clear-sighted - clear-sighted enough, that is, to see if there is enough love between the two to last a lifetime. So, courtship is the time not so much for enjoying love, as for discovering love: to discover the extent and depth of love; and the capacity of each one to love. In a word, it is the time for giving love a chance to grow.  
Precisely because the physical sexual attraction is easily awakened and easily grows in intensity, it must be recognized for what it is, treated firmly, and kept in its place. If given rein, it grows; a couple can feel strongly drawn to one another as if they were deeply in love; but if they marry based only on that, it may not last; for they never created the conditions in which mutual love and respect could grow.

Sexual intercourse, the natural expression of sexual love?  
So we can now propose the main question: if intercourse in marriage is not only an expression of love but a means to make love grow, why should intercourse before marriage not equally be a means of expressing love and helping it to grow?  
In the first place, marital intercourse, while licit, is not always an expression of love; it is not so when it is simply a means of self-satisfaction and not of self-giving. And in that case it does not help love to grow either - also because the other spouse will be aware of the dominant self-seeking involved. So it is not altogether true to say that sexual intercourse is the natural expression of human sexual love. It is the natural expression in certain circumstances, but not in others. To understand this is vital; and it is not too difficult to understand - if one really wants to. Let us try to spell the matter out.  
There are many bodily ways of showing one's appreciation of another person. A negative appreciation is shown by a scowl or by turning one's back on him or her; a positive appreciation by a smile or a handshake, if it is sincere. Holding hands seems to go farther, just as a hug or a kiss is usually a sign of special affection [5]. An exceptionally warm handshake seems to say, "I am so glad to see you because you are someone very special to me; someone I feel I can count on; and I want you to know that you can count on me". Certain physical gestures of appreciation convey a lot, or else they are false and insincere.  
What do two people show when they hold hands? Affection?; it could be. When they kiss? Even more affection?; it could also be. To engage in sexual intimacy surely signifies more than merely holding hands or kissing. What more does it show? And why does it show more? It shows more because it gives more: not just pleasure, but oneself. Hence, if it is mutual, it is the gift of two selves to each other and so is an act of union.  
That is why it is a gift I would not give to anyone but only to someone very, very special. In the end I think I would only give myself to someone who is not only prepared to accept that gift of mine but is equally prepared to make me a similar gift of their self. Otherwise, I am giving too much in exchange for too little; and am poorer, much poorer, as a result.  
No; genuine love between a man and a woman is never sufficiently expressed in mere sexual intercourse, because what love longs for is a union not just of bodies but of souls [6]. What true love desires is not merely to possess or enjoy this boy or girl, but to be united to him or her; and that means to give myself to him or her, receiving his or her gift of self in return. What a marvelous project this is: I give myself to someone and he or she to me, and we belong to each other...  
We will belong to one another! She or he will belong to me, will be mine; and I hers or his. It is important for young people to dwell on the beauty and challenge of this aspiration of love; otherwise they may not be aware of a special modern difficulty standing in the way of the development of their love - which is not just a general disregard for chastity, but a generalized fear of commitment: a point we will enlarge upon in a few moments.

More on the relation between love and respect  
Since two people are involved - me and him or her - a test of the experience of intimacy is to check whether it leaves me "closer" to the other, more appreciative of the other, with more regard for him or her, or with less? If there is less respect, then the "intimacy" has left us farther apart and not closer together. No real expression of love should have that consequence.  
Firmness and quickness on the part of either one of the couple in cutting short something that they sense has begun to be self-seeking, is a deep sign of respect for the other. Rather than a refusal to express love, it is an expression of love. The opposite can be an expression of simple selfishness.  
Respect, as we saw, remains the first test of love and friendship: love calls for respect. Lack of respect denies or undermines love. As we have said, this is a basic principle too of human sexual relations. Will my relationship with girls or boys be marked by respect (appreciation, admiration) or will it be one of use-exploitation [7]? Will it be outward-going, or turned in on myself? It is the alternative between love (learning gradually and with effort to love) and self-seeking (slumping quickly and easily into selfishness).  
Here again, we can validate this by the standards of ordinary friendship. The first and most basic quality of friendship is desiring what is good for one's friend and if possible being an agent of that good for him or her. To have a friend whom one enjoys or uses or exploits, but does not respect, is not to have or not to be a friend. In the case of a more particular boy-girl relationship, the test of friendship retains its validity and becomes even more important. Applying this to my girl-friend or boy-friend: how much do I appreciate, admire, respect him or her? If such attitudes are lacking, then he or she is not a friend to me; or I am not a friend to him or her. We are just taking advantage of each other.  
Girls need to know that while a woman, or at least some women, can admire a man even if he is graspingly sensual (she may still find in this a sign of masculinity), the opposite is not true. A man may indeed desire a sensual woman, but will never admire her; her sensuality is seen as a feminine defect. It is beside the point for the radical feminist to rail at this, as if it "handicapped" the woman. Behind the sexual psychology involved is the fact that men expect women to be better - to be "purer" - and in their hearts despise the woman who is not.

"Giving" excludes casual lending-borrowing  
Intercourse means giving, not just lending. One can lend oneself for a day or a night, or indefinitely - until I take myself back; since a loan is always something one can reclaim. That is not the way with a gift. One gives oneself for keeps. Otherwise there is no real giving. How does one love? Temporarily, tentatively, or for always? What does human nature look for? A provisional, trial friendship or love that I can never really rely on because it may be taken back at any moment - and then I find myself once more friendless or loveless? Is that what one really wants? Are tentative affairs all that I want, all that I trust?  
One only gives oneself to someone very special. Do I want to have someone very special in my life, so special that I am ready to give to him or her what I would give to no one else? Or do I just not care about being that special to anyone, or to have someone that special to me? The "I just don't care" approach can be dressed up here in an apparent self-sufficiency - "I prefer independence". But it really means, "I don't mind loneliness", because that is what it leads to and where it ultimately leaves a person. Is that what one wants?  
And yet, wanting it or not, is this not the situation in which many young people find themselves today? More isolated as a result of sharing an "intense" experience with someone else. Intense experiences of self-satisfaction do not overcome solitude. Only deep experiences of sharing and giving can do that. The experience of casual sex may be intense but it is not deep; it is passing and superficial. It leaves the individual isolated because he or she has reduced what should be a great human experience to an intoxicating but trivial one. Then one has nothing to look forward to except more of the same, progressively more enslaved to experiences that leave one's life progressively more empty and meaningless.  
"Safe sex" has become a catchword today. But what the sexual relationship most needs to be made safe against is selfishness. "Selfish sex" is so easy and so destructive. Self-centered sex tends to violence in man, and to exploitation in woman; brute instinct in man, and calculating vanity in woman. Both are formidable enemies to love. Any yielding to selfishness lessens a person's capacity to love, slows them down in the process of learning to love, and encloses them more and more in isolation.

To give oneself, one must possess oneself  
One cannot make a gift unless one has something to give. Every girl who gives herself lightly knows that she has thrown away her virginal self. And in return for what? That virginity, the physical sign and proof that a girl has kept herself whole so as to give herself integrally and definitively, is now no longer hers to offer as the pledge and proof of her definitive gift of self. She has radically devalued herself in her own sight and in the sight of any man who may eventually marry her. It is of course true that a man can similarly devalue himself. But it is nature's way that the woman has to pay her own devaluation at a higher cost.  
Can a marriage between two non-virginal persons never work out well? It can; but only if the couple are able to generate marital love of such generous quality as to dispel the sense of second-handedness marking their first marital encounter, the sense of making and accepting an already used gift. That second-hand sense always accompanies a marital union which has been preceded by sex with a third party. But the cheapening consequences are also inevitable if the marriage is non-virginal because the couple have engaged in pre-marital sex between themselves. They can never have the absolutely unique experience of two people who in their courtship have so loved and respected one another as to keep themselves totally, precisely in order to give themselves fully and for the first time - that experience proper to the wedding night, which more than anything else confirms the seal of true, faithful, and exclusive love and hallows each of the spouses before the other. The marriage of a couple who have been 'loose' before their wedding can never have that experience or be so sealed. Will they ever be able to achieve that deep reverence for one another and for the marital act when their approach to marriage had been marked by such little understanding of the mystery of sex and such little respect for one another?

'Trial' commitments. Fear of commitment  
As we mentioned above, a mood dominates our modern outlook that must be overcome if one is to find the fullness of happiness which love seems to offer; that mood is the prevalent fear of commitment. It is a major threat to self-giving love. Modern man is afraid of commitment because it seems to imply renouncing one's freedom. Unless he overcomes this prejudice his "freedom" is useless, because he will never be able to make worthwhile choices, or to stick by them. To be afraid of commitment is to be afraid of freedom itself. It shows a mind which finds nothing worth choosing or a will incapable of sticking by a worthwhile choice; or both. In any case such a person remains incapable of true self-giving. He is afraid of love, whereas what he needs to be afraid of is selfishness. Love opens one up to new horizons and challenges of generosity, happiness, communion. Selfishness, the inability to love and to break out of oneself, leaves a person in growing isolation, centering in ever-diminishing circles around themselves [8].  
There is a pervading philosophy or attitude in our present-day culture which promotes "independence" against commitment, that is, against "belonging" or mutual dependence, and hence against marriage. Anyone contemplating marriage today needs to understand this and to clarify their own stance on the issue of "freedom vs. commitment". The person who always wants the "freedom to be free", will never be free to love, for no one is truly "in love" unless they want to commit themselves in love. How can one claim "to be in love" if one is resolved "to walk out of love" as soon as loving the other person becomes a bit difficult? Then at the most, one is "in love" with oneself, and in danger of remaining trapped in love for oneself: in the most miserable and isolated form of love which so easily turns into self-contempt and even self-hatred. To be isolated in self-hatred; it sounds like hell, doesn't it? Indeed, unless overcome, it is its anticipation.  
It is not good for man to be alone; or to "half-give" himself. Hence derives the radically unsatisfying and frustrating nature of "quasi-marital" ties: namely, where there is no binding commitment. I refer here not to simple promiscuity but to couples who want some sort of semi-conjugal relationship, in which there will be a certain sense of belonging to each other; but not definitively, always with a way out.  
Such a relationship is something so much less than marriage that a couple experimenting with it are not likely ever to marry; or if they do, their marriage is not likely to last. Their approach is too flawed. Each one remains fundamentally his or her own project; there is no shared enterprise. "I" rather than "we" remains the reference point and center for each. The other is never regarded as more than a "trial" partner; good for something but not worth really committing oneself to.  
Here there is no real giving of self; each one only lends to the other, gives only in part. Their subsequent lives can seldom shake off the feeling that I have never found anyone worth giving myself to; or I have never been capable of giving myself; or perhaps simply: I have never been accepted; nobody ever thought me worth accepting unconditionally [9].  
People who do not love cannot find love; people who do not give themselves cannot find themselves. The way of quasi-commitment is a way of self-frustration. There you don't give anything. You "pawn" yourself; and so you can always "redeem yourself". But at what a cost! For what you redeem is a devalued self, and the more often you pawn, the more devalued is the self you reclaim and take back.  
"Love between man and woman would be evil, or at least incomplete, if it went no farther than love as desire. For love as desire is not the whole essence of love between persons. It is not enough to long for a person as a good for oneself, one must also, and above all, long for that person's good" [10]. That is why there is so little love in cohabitation: I will live with you (but not for you) as long as you seem to be good for me.

Lust  
Sexuality and its complications remain an unresolved mystery to the person who does not understand that the man-woman relationship is marred and constantly threatened by lust. Lust is what is most to be feared in sexuality, bearing in mind that lust is not to be equated simply with the sexual appetite and less still with sexual attraction. It is that unregulated and self-centered aspect of sexual desire that of its very nature is an enemy of love [11].  
Lust is not to be identified with the simple desire for or the experience of sexual pleasure in conjugal intercourse. Lust is the self-absorbed, dominant, and assertive desire just for that pleasure in itself. Lust is a wholly self-centered force. It is not a desire for true conjugal union and for the pleasure with which God has wished to endow that physical act of giving self and accepting the other; it is an obsessive desire for the pleasure of intercourse as an end in itself. If what is sought is the pleasure of the act, and not also its significance, then the relationship is dominated by lust. Married couples are the first who need to realize this. Then they are in a position to deepen their mutual love, not by abstaining from marital intercourse but by a constant work of purifying their experience of it, so that the joy of mutual self-donation and union is of greater importance than the satisfaction of simple physical appetite [12].  
Only the fact of being bonded together in marriage empowers two people to gradually purify whatever self-seeking is present in their intercourse, and so endow their love with the sense of generous self-giving and of mutual respect in the absence of which love simply cannot grow. Two people who are not married but engage in intercourse may love each other - for the time being - but their intercourse shows a surrender to weakness and to lust rather than any expression of true love. Not being committed to one another, the love of each is utilitarian: I use him, I use her - for my own satisfaction. Such an uncommitted love remains fundamentally self-centered. It is destined to die because, without commitment, a person never chooses any love that is worthwhile. All they choose is a feeling, a mood, a simulation of love that does not go deep enough to mature or to last.  
I recall a marriage case in which the woman testified to a main reason which attracted her initially to her eventual husband: "he never made you feel he was only after your body; he wanted to be friends. That's important today, too: not to feel you only have a body". It is an important question throughout courtship: Is it only my body he or she is interested in? Is it mainly my body? And what interests me mainly in him or her? If one cannot distinguish between love and lust, one will be hard put to answer those questions.

The "family project"  
It is difficult to prepare well for marriage and to look on it in all its greatness if it is regarded simply as the union of two persons who may 'suit' each other. Marriage is meant to be much more than finding a travelling companion who can hopefully secure the journey of life from being too lonely. It is a whole project of building the future; of joy at the prospect of carrying on the work of creation in union with someone else. If a couple's idea of marriage does not expand out into that of a "family project", then they are stuck within small horizons and lack the prospect of being founding fathers of a new world.  
What a poor mentality is shown by the one who rejects the family project! "I am not interested in future generations, in people who may come after me, not even in those who could be a continuation of me, of my effort, of my dedication, of my worth as a person, of my love". But then, what am I interested in? In me? - in such a worthless me? Yes, then it is sadly logical that I should not want to perpetuate my valueless life. But, is that life of mine inexorably without values? Could I not change?  
It is only natural to want to do something of worth with one's life. Marriage used to be considered the common, and yet individual, worthwhile adventure to which each one is called; and a large part of one's adolescent life was guided by the sense of preparing for such a sacred venture. There was a sense of greatness in this preparation: the greatness of preparing oneself to share life with someone one can trust, to be someone who can oneself be trusted, to found a family, to continue the work of creation... There was and is a good pride here - that the pusillanimous person can indeed turn his or her back on, and then be left with all the sadness of having had no ideals.  
Some years ago a night-school teacher who found one of his students very down, referred him to me. I talked with him a couple of times. Indeed he was down. It was hard to find any spark of life or ambition in him. Finally, perhaps in a moment of impatience, I asked him, "But man, don't you have any ideals?" He hesitated - but then answered, "No". A bit taken aback, perhaps by the directness of the answer, I asked him again: "But, doesn't that seem sad to you?" His answer, once more after a pause, was just as direct: "Yes".  
How much a No and a Yes can say about a life. Perhaps if more people today asked themselves the question, "what ideals do I have in my life?" and answered sincerely, they would be in a better position to grasp the real value of their lives, and the prospect of real emptiness that may be facing them.  
**NOTES**  
[1] Drawn from a new chapter in the latest edition of the author's "Covenanted Happiness".  
[2] It is through a process of discovering that one cannot always have one's own way, however much one wants to, a process of having quarrels, making up, giving and taking, that a child gradually learns to share, and so to be a friend, and to make and keep friends.  
[3] The Harry Potter series points up a lot of this. At the start Harry, Ron, and Hermione are particular friends. Two boys who "share" the same girl-friend; and one girl who has two boy-friends. Of course, later in the series the relationship changes.  
[4] Persons are not meant to be used but to be loved or at least respected; sexual use is one of the worst modes and quickest ways of degrading personal relations.  
[5] It is true today that we have become prodigal in kissing almost everyone, even complete strangers. It is also true that signs of affection, once overdone, become banalized. The indiscriminate giving to everyone of very special signs of affection, is either of saints or of people with a superficial sense of human relations.  
[6] The latter is what shows a real union between persons. Whoever reduces the sexual relationship to a union of bodies without a union of souls will never marry - or will fail in marriage - , for marriage can only be properly understood and successfully undertaken precisely as a joining of two separate persons in a unity of mutual self-giving, dependence and common undertaking.  
[7] "the desire to use another person is fundamentally incompatible with love": Karol Wojtyla: Love and Responsibility, p. 124; "There is a fundamental contradiction between 'loving' and 'using' a person" ibid. p. 231.  
[8] "Love consists of a commitment which limits one's freedom - it is a giving of the self, and to give oneself means just that: to limit one's freedom on behalf of another. Limitation of one's freedom might seem to be something negative and unpleasant, but love makes it a positive, joyful and creative thing. Freedom exists for the sake of love. If freedom is not used, is not taken advantage of by love, it becomes a negative thing and gives human beings a feeling of emptiness and unfulfilment" K. Wojtyla: Love and Responsibility, 135.  
[9] Psychiatric studies show that the choice to live together, instead of marrying, easily induces deep-rooted anxiety and insecurity: for example, see Nadelson-Notman: "To Marry or Not to Marry: a Choice": American Journal of Psychiatry, 138 (1981), p. 1354.  
[10] Karol Wojtyla: Love and Responsibility, 83.  
[11] cf. C. Burke: "A Postscript to the 'Remedium Concupiscentiae'", The Thomist 70 (2006): 481-536 ([www.cormacburke.or.ke/node/902](http://www.cormacburke.or.ke/node/902)).  
[12] cf. "A Postscript...", p. 525-529.

3. What marriage is for

What do people consent to when they marry?  
If you don't know what something is for, it is not likely to work out well in your hands. What is marriage for? Does it have a purpose? What is it meant to achieve? What are its ends?  
Getting married is a joint affair. You can't marry someone who won't marry you. To marry, two persons must coincide together in the same project, founded on their mutual consent. Consent to what?  
What do a man and a woman who marry consent to? What sort of arrangement do they enter? Just to live together for a time? Just to enjoy a sexual relationship for as long as it suits both or just one of them? If it is no more than that, it doesn't sound like any big deal, nor would it seem to justify the usual ceremonies or celebrations that people tend to associate with getting married.  
If marriage means something more, what in fact do two people consent to when they marry? What does marital consent imply? What is really meant by that traditional formula still used in so many marriage ceremonies - "I take you as my husband or wife, for better or for worse, for richer or for poorer, in sickness and in health, all the days of my life, till death do us part"? As it stands, it already says a lot. But if we want to grasp all that it implies, a short excursion into canon law can help.  
The idea of marriage as lifelong union of a man and a woman in order to have a family has been there from the start of recorded history. To defend this natural institution has always been a main concern of Christianity in its teaching and laws. When church law was codified [28] in 1917, the nature of marital consent was expressed in canon 1081: "Marriage consent is an act of the will by which each party gives and accepts the perpetual and exclusive right over the body with regard to acts apt of themselves for the generation of offspring". This, it must be admitted, may be legal but it is certainly not very romantic, expressing nothing of the aspect of a special love between two persons that most people associate with marriage.  
Vatican Council II, the main ecclesial event in the second half of the twentieth century, led to a new Code of Canon Law refashioned precisely so as to reflect the spirit of the Council [29]. The 1983 Code describes marital consent as an "act of will by which a man and a woman by an irrevocable covenant mutually give and accept one another for the purpose of establishing a marriage" (canon 1057).  
What is the point of this very differently worded definition? The first thing to note is the use of the word "covenant", a term with deep biblical roots which implies a special alliance or bonding between persons. In the Old Testament the word has application above all to the covenant God himself makes with his people, treating them with a love that is spousal and unbreakable, and calling on them to return that same love [30]. Covenant in that sense can offer a key to the most significant phrase in canon 1057, "give and accept one another". Marriage is not just a contract (though it is also that), it is a covenant. In other words it is a very special form of love-contract or bond by which each spouse offers himself or herself as a gift to the other and accepts the reciprocal self-gift of the other [31].  
This new definition of marital consent has been rightly described as "personalist". It reflects christian personalism, a philosophy of man in which "to give oneself" - to something worthwhile - is a key condition of personal growth. This personalism largely inspires the anthropological thinking of Vatican II, and finds its most concise expression in a central statement of the Pastoral Constitution Gaudium et spes: "man can only find himself in the sincere gift of himself..." (24). The conciliar affirmation may seem new, but in fact it is as old as the Gospel. In its apparently paradoxical form ("give - if you want to find"), it presents the same challenge Jesus put to all his followers two thousand years ago: "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it" [32]. It is all-important to realize that this gospel program of life, given to us by Our Lord, is in direct contrast with the prescription for living so commonly offered by contemporary psychology - seek self, find self, identify self, esteem self, assert self, care for self, hold on to self, don't let go of yourself...  
Jesus flatly rejects this modern prescription, and attaches a dire warning to his rejection. He clearly tell us: if you hold on to yourself in protective self-centeredness, you will never find your real self; you will lose it. The real happiness and fulfilled identity you are made for come only if you give yourself to something worthwhile, opening yourself generously to love (and all true love leads to Me). Thus and in no other way will you find that fulfilment and that happiness.  
Christian personalism expresses this radical gospel principle; and only those who grasp this principle will understand the deepened vision of marriage - as a reciprocal self-gift for life - that flows from the Second Vatican Council, and realise that to consent to marriage is to consent to a giving-losing-finding way of life that has been constituted by God and willed by him for the vast majority of mankind.

Married personalism  
Marriage represents the most concrete natural type of self-giving for which man and woman are made. As Gaudium et spes also says: the "partnership of man and woman constitutes the first form of communion between persons" (no. 12). Major texts of the magisterium have continued to expound marriage in a personalist light [34] and, as we have seen, marital consent is now explained in wholly personalist terms: that act of the will by which a man and a woman mutually give and accept each other in order to establish a marriage [35]. The man gives self as man and husband, the woman as woman and wife; and each receives the other as spouse. One wonders if the scope and power - the beauty and the demands - of this new formula have been fully appreciated, especially in the fields of seminary training, marriage counselling, and tribunal work on marriage cases.

What does God want people to achieve through marriage?  
What, then, was God's purpose in instituting marriage? Or more precisely still, what are the ends God appointed to it - the ends to which the spouses consent if they really intend a marriage such as God designed it?  
It can help to avoid confusion here if one bears in mind the elementary distinction between subjective ends and objective ends. The subjective ends are what a particular person seeks in marrying. The objective ends are what marriage in itself, in its divine design, is meant to achieve. Ideally the objective and the subjective ends should coincide. But they may not. After all, the subjective ends or motives for marrying are seldom quite the same in the case of each spouse; rather they can be multiple and indeed infinitely variable. They may be generous and idealistic; or mean and calculating. One person may marry mainly for money or social status or political ambition, another to escape from a home or working situation they find boring or intolerable. One party may think that the main purpose of marry is to please, while the other thinks it is to have pleasure. Even when both marry out of love, the concept of love each has does not necessarily coincide. One may think of love in terms of 'what makes me happy'; the other in terms of 'making someone else happy'.  
There can be opposition between the personal and subjective ends of each of the spouses, and this undoubtedly is a main reason why far too many marriages don't work out. Nevertheless that opposition might have been overcome if the objective and God-given ends of marriage had been better understood by the spouses when they thought of getting married; and if later on, when their marriage began to run into the difficulties every marriage encounters, they had recalled those ends more in their struggle to keep their union together.

How the Church has presented the God-given ends of marriage  
A further historical note is called for here. A significant development in the Church's teaching about the ends of marriage took place in the 20th century. Theologians had for long presented these ends in a hierarchical fashion; having children was considered the 'primary' end, while there were two 'secondary' ends - mutual help and the remedy of concupiscence. Early in the last century, the question of the primary end began to be debated. A school of thought emerged which proposed "love" as an end to be ranked equal in importance to the begetting of children [35]. For a time it was suggested that this view represented a "personalist" understanding of marriage, whereas in fact it turned out to be extremely individualistic. In any case it has been overtaken by a truer personalism, expressed both in the Second Vatican Council and in the teaching of Pope John Paul II, which has provided us with renewed understanding of the purposes or ends of marriage as they were in the beginning, and of the harmony between these different ends [36].  
The influence of authentic Christian personalism is evident in how the 1983 Code of Canon Law modifies the 1917 Code in expressing the ends or purposes of marriage. The common teaching of 100 years ago was proposed in canon 1013 of the old Code in these words: "The primary end of matrimony is the procreation and education of offspring; the secondary end is mutual aid and the remedy of concupiscence". The corresponding canon in the 1983 Code states, "The marriage covenant... is of its own very nature ordered to the well-being of the spouses and to the procreation and upbringing of children" [37]. Evidently there are major changes here that call for comment. There are also (as one would expect in church teaching) points of continuity that may not be so evident and hence have to be spelled out.  
To begin with, one notes the dropping of the terms "primary" and "secondary" regarding to the ends [38]. The change here, as I understand it, marks an enriching development. As we have seen, the idea of a hierarchy of ends was at times debated as if the ends had little mutual relationship and could often be in opposition. The new way of expressing the ends underlines the essential interdependence and connection between them. This is a major point that runs through much of the thinking of this book.  
In terms of development of doctrine, there is something even more important to be noted: the fact that the new formula, putting the two institutional ends side by side, reflects and integrates the two biblical accounts of the divine institution of marriage itself. ***Two*** biblical accounts? Yes, for here we would recall a striking fact that has seldom been given the attention it merits. The Book of Genesis contains in fact not one but two separate accounts of the divine creation of man and woman and of the institution of marriage. In chapter one of Genesis we read, "God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it" (Gen 1:27-28). The account given in the following chapter is in a quite different key: "Then the Lord God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him"... [And God made woman]... "and brought her to the man. Then the man said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh...". Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh" (Gen 2:18-24).  
The first of these narratives clearly stresses the procreative character of marriage, while the other puts equally clear stress on its complementary and unitive nature. Another point stands out. In narrating the institution of matrimony under two distinct accounts (a fact which is hardly to be attributed to absentmindedness on the part of the Holy Spirit), Genesis reveals a divine intention to emphasize the close connection and interdependence between the two aspects or purposes of marriage. It incidentally shows too how groundless it is to speak (rather disparagingly) of the procreative aspect as corresponding to an "institutional" vision of marriage, while the unitive aspect would fall under a more modern "personalist" understanding. It is clear from the Genesis narratives that both the procreative and the unitive aspects are institutional inasmuch as both are clearly proposed in the original divine institution of marriage. As we will try to show, both ends also are personalist.

The "good of the spouses" as an end of marriage  
There is little need to dwell on procreation as an end of marriage since it has been accepted as such since time immemorial. Perhaps the only new thing to say about it is that it seems to be an end which many people today are not too happy with and seek to restrict or even avoid completely. We will come back to this later on. For the moment, let us concentrate on the end termed the "good of the spouses" (the bonum coniugum in Latin) which is indeed a new term in ecclesial usage and hence merits proper consideration and analysis.  
In my view a lot of what has been written about the "good of the spouses" over the last twenty five years has missed the mark, identifying it largely with the simple achievement of happiness in married life or, as others would put in, with a growing and satisfying experience of conjugal love. This is to make the objective (institutional) end of marriage coincide with the subjective end of most people who marry - which is hardly an adequate analysis. In any case, when the Church speaks of the ends of marriage, it is referring to its objective ends as an institution, not of the subjective ends the parties may have.  
Does this mean that there is no connection whatever between the subjective and the objective ends? Not necessarily. As we have seen, the subjective end of those marrying may vary indefinitely. Yet some degree of happiness is the purpose or at least the hope of most people marrying. This is natural and legitimate. However few marriages live up to the happy hopes that most people put into marrying, for the human hope of happiness is really without limit. Such marriages would not seem to have fulfilled the spouses' hopes or ends; does that mean that the end of marriage itself has equally failed? Or are we saying that marriage, as the Church conceives it, has nothing to do with aspirations of love or with the happiness that genuine love is commonly expected to give? No, and very far from it.  
One is always speaking superficially of love if one dwells on its "rights" or expectations and not, at least in equal measure, on its "duties" and demands. This is elementary within the personalist philosophy of "fulfilment through giving oneself". True personalism is concerned with the growth of the person towards maturity. Within this philosophy it is, we repeat, the commitment of marriage - with the demands of a faithful and sacrificed love - that brings spouses to the fullness of personal maturity: the maximum development, that is, of their capacity to love. Therein lies their true and definitive "good".  
God could have created the human race in a unisex - sexless - pattern, and provided for its continuation otherwise than by sex. Genesis seems to make it clear that creation would have been less good if he had done so; "it is not good for man - or woman - to be alone". So sexuality appears in the Bible as part of a plan for personal fulfillment, a factor meant to contribute to the perfecting of the human being (as well as for the continuation of the human race). The basic anthropological point is that the human person is not self-sufficient, but needs others, with a special need for an "other", a partner, a spouse.  
Each human person, in the awareness of his or her contingency, wishes to be loved: to be in some way unique for someone. Each one, if he or she does not find anyone to love him or her, is haunted by the temptation to feel worthless. Further, it is not enough to be loved; it is necessary to love. A person who is loved can be unhappy, if he or she is unable to love. Everyone is loved (at least by God); not everyone learns to love. To learn to love is as great a human need as to know oneself loved; only so can a person be saved from self-pity or self-isolation, or from both.  
To learn to love demands coming out of self: through firm dedication - in good times and bad - to another, to others. What a person has to learn is not passing love, but committed love. We all stand in need of a commitment to love. Such is the priesthood, or a life dedicated directly to God. And such is marriage, the dedication to which God calls the majority. To bind people definitively to the process of learning to love was God's original design for marriage, confirmed by Our Lord (Mt. 19:8ff). The married commitment is by nature something demanding. This is brought out by the words with which the spouses express their mutual acceptance of one another, through "irrevocable personal consent" [39], "for better or for worse, for richer or for poorer, in sickness and in health... all the days of my life" [40].  
While this commitment is indeed demanding, it is also deeply natural and attractive. Real love means it, when it says, "I'll love you for always". Among other things, this could suggest that in the education given to our young people, clearer stress should be placed on the fact that human beings, in distinction to animals, are created not just with a sexual instinct, but with a conjugal instinct [41].

Sexual instinct; conjugal instinct  
The sexual instinct is natural, developing by itself and quick to make itself present. More than development, it needs control; it is often more intense toward one person, but not normally limited to one. The conjugal instinct is also natural, though slower to make itself present; it needs to be developed; it scarcely needs to be controlled; it is generally limited to one person.  
The conjugal instinct draws man and woman to total commitment to one person, to a permanent association or covenant of love, and to be faithful to that freely assumed commitment. The widespread frustration in the area of sex which people sense today, is a frustration of conjugality rather than of mere sexuality. It follows from what we saw in chapter two. As the conjugal instinct is understood, developed, and matured, it tends strongly to facilitate sexual control, by inducing sexual respect. It is normal for a young couple in love to have an ideal of marriage before them: each sees the other as possible life-companion, and mother or father of one's future children; someone therefore who can be absolutely unique in one's life. While this applies reciprocally in the sexual relationship, it has a particular application in how a man relates to a woman for, as we saw in chapter 1, nothing can help a man respect the woman he loves so much as the prospect that she may in the future come to be the mother of his children.

Marital love and marital defects  
It is easy to love good people. The program of Christianity is that we also learn to love "bad" people, that is, people with defects. Within our present context, its particular program is that whoever freely enters the marital covenant of love and life with another - no doubt because he or she sees unique goodness in that person - should be prepared to remain faithful to the covenant, even if later on objective or subjective considerations make the other seem to have lost any exceptional goodness and rather to be characterized by a series of maddening defects.  
The discovery of mutual defects in marriage is inevitable, but not incompatible with the fulfillment of the good of the spouses. On the contrary, one can say that the experience of mutual defects is essential if married life itself is to achieve the true divine idea of the bonum coniugum. As effortless romance fades, the stage is set for each of the spouses to get down to the business of learning to love the other, as he or she really is. It is then that they grow as persons. Here lies the seriousness and beauty of the challenge contained in marriage: it remains a critical point to be stressed in education and counselling.  
Romance is almost sure to die; love however does not have to die with it. Love is meant to mature, and can do so if that readiness for sacrifice implied in the original self-giving of marital consent is alive or can be activated. The idea that true love is prepared for sacrifice strikes a chord which perhaps our preaching needs to touch on more. As Pope John Paul II has written: "It is natural for the human heart to accept demands, even difficult ones, in the name of love for an ideal, and above all in the name of love for a person" [42].  
Human nature is a mixture and conflict of good and bad tendencies. Are we appealing sufficiently to the good tendencies? Or do we yield at times to the temptation to think that the bad are more powerful? We need to strengthen our faith not only in God, but also in the goodness of his creation, recalling what St. Thomas Aquinas teaches, bonum est potentius quam malum [43]: "good is more powerful than evil", and its appeal strikes deeper into our nature, for goodness rooted in truth remains the most fundamental need of the human person. In Veritatis splendor, it is from our natural quest or thirst for the good that John Paul II builds up his presentation of the splendor and attraction of the truth [44].  
Contrary tendencies can be natural. In the face of danger it is natural to feel tempted to be a coward and run away. But it is also natural to want to be brave and face the danger. A mother or father may have a natural tendency toward selfishness; yet they have a no less natural tendency to care for their children: a maternal or paternal instinct. Similarly, while it is natural for strains to develop between husband and wife, it is also natural for them to want to preserve their love from the threat of these strains. What we have called the conjugal instinct calls them to be faithful, whereas a person senses something soft, mean and selfish, in a refusal to face up to the challenge of fidelity. As against this, there would seem to be little that is natural, and nothing that is inevitable, in the phenomenon of two people, who at one moment thought each other absolutely unique, ending up five or ten years later unable to stand one another.  
Let us go back to Scripture, for I think we can find confirmation there of this point of our argument. While the expression bonum coniugum or "good of the spouses" may seem new, its scriptural credentials are arguably at least as valid as those of mutuum adiutorium or "mutual help", both being drawn from the very same passage in Genesis. It was precisely because God thought it is not good ["non est bonum"] for man or woman to be alone, that he wanted each to have a helpmate ["adiutorium"]. The helpmate, therefore, was given for the sake of their good: their "bonum". This is the end of marriage that God is proposing in Genesis 2:18. His purpose is that the woman, as wife, be a help towards the good of the man, her husband; and that the man, as husband, be a help towards the good of the woman, his wife. A help towards what sort of good? Here is the confirmation of our thesis. Everything God has made is designed to prepare us for Heaven, to share in his life, in what he is by nature. "God is love" (1 Jn 4:8) by nature. We are not; but we are made for love and can never become what we are made to be unless we learn to love. That is our true good, and for that we have to overcome selfishness, come out of ourselves, give ourselves to others. That is what learning to love involves. Marriage is the normal school of love, and husband and wife are mutually teachers, helpers, and learners all at the same time.  
So (the point can scarcely be emphasized too much), marriage is meant not so much for enjoying love as for training in love, maturing in love. There is nothing better a person can do than to learn to love. It is a first condition for finding the relative happiness that earth can offer (if one doesn't know how to love, one will never be happy), and it prepares us for the limitless happiness of heaven.  
That then is what marriage, and the family, is really about. Not to make me happy here and now, but to prepare me for eternal happiness, to "qualify" me for the happiness of God himself. Hence those who think that marriage should provide immediate or automatic happiness, are not on God's wavelength. Further, marriage is never just a "me" affair; it is not meant to be me-after-my-own-good (the one-sided approach of selfishness), it is "us", me and my spouse, the two-of-us-together-after-our-joint-good (the conjugal approach) and after the good of our family.

Is it hard to achieve the "good of the spouses"?  
Marriage consent means that the spouses decide to mutually give and accept each other. But note well that it is not a decision only to give oneself (which certainly means a lot); it is equally a decision to accept another - which can perhaps mean even more. The true "good of the spouses" results from making both decisions and carrying them out. True conjugal love places a personalist accent not only on the sincere "giving of oneself", but on the no less sincere "accepting of the other": accepting him or her as he or she really is, defects and all. True married commitment - "for better or for worse"; "till death do us part" - is always the pledge of two defective people trying to love each other as they are, defects and all, and to stick to the task. That contributes powerfully to their maturing, their growth and fulfillment as persons, their genuine personalist good - their "bonum".  
So, to identify the bonum coniugum, as a divinely given end of marriage, with "shared happiness" does not seem adequate. If one is to make any sense of the practical working of God's providence, the achievement of the "good of the spouses" also involves sharing many things that, to human eyes at least, cannot be termed "happy": ill-health, loss of job, financial hardships, etc. "Shared hardships" can contribute enormously to the "good", the growth as a person, of each of the spouses. Even what might be considered unilateral hardships (such as the burden of a disabled husband falling totally on the wife; or the case of infidelity of one partner, where the other remains faithful to the bond) can serve the deeper good of at least one of the parties, in a way that perhaps would not have been brought about by some easier lot...  
Aunt Betsey, in Charles Dickens' David Copperfield, was a bossy but wise woman. When David began to experience the difficulties that came from having married Dora, a very immature and childish girl (only a "child-wife" as Dora herself pleaded to David), Aunt Betsey declined to intervene in order to correct or train Dora, and she told David: "You have chosen freely for yourself, and you have chosen a very pretty and a very affectionate creature. It will be your duty, and it will be your pleasure too, to estimate her (as you chose her) by the qualities she has, and not by the qualities she may not have. The latter you must develop in her, if you can. And if you cannot, you must just accustom yourself to do without them.... This is marriage" [45].

Institutional, personalist, inseparable ends  
To sum up. The purpose of marriage is twofold - the "good of the spouses" and the procreation-education of children. One only consents to marry if one accepts and consents to both these ends. Each of these ends is an institutional end - given by God when He instituted marriage. And each of them is personalist in its nature, that is, designed to draw each of the spouses out of self and to grow, by learning to give that self to their spouse and to their children.  
Is it possible to separate the two ends, to treat them as unconnected and even in some way as in mutual opposition? In one's mind, yes. In reality, no; not at least without undermining any true understanding of the vital structure of matrimony.  
Marriage was instituted for the maturing of the spouses through learning to love each other, defects and all, and so to bestow on one another the great good of a faithful, generous, patient, and sacrificed spousal love. And it was instituted for having and caring for a family, if God so blessed the spouses: instituted, that is, for the procreation and education of children, to be achieved through the passing physical union of husband and wife and through the abiding and growing existential and organic unity between them.  
The institution was one, although it is described in Genesis in two distinct versions. It is God who has put these ends together in one institution, and man should resist the tendency to separate them.

Same-sex marriages  
Though much spoken about in our contemporary western world, the topic remains a minor phenomenon. Whatever one wishes to make of same-sex unions, the concept of a same-sex marriage makes no sense within any Christian or even natural view of matrimony. God did not set mankind going with a pair of Adams or a pair of Eves, but with one man and one woman, with a masculine and a feminine nature respectively, made to complement one another psychologically and physically to the extent of becoming "one flesh" (Gen 2:24), also as the united principle (parenthood: paternity-maternity) of the family - the first natural cell from which a love-based society can be built up. A 'same-sex marriage' fails on all counts to fit into this natural and logical scheme [46].

4. What has gone wrong with marriage today?  
"Our age is one marked by a great crisis, which appears above all as a profound crisis of truth. A crisis of truth means a crisis of concepts. Do the words "love," "freedom," "sincere gift" and even "person" and "rights of the person" really convey their essential meaning?" (John Paul II, Letter to Families, 13). As we have been seeing, the crisis of fundamental concepts extends today also and very specially to sexual identity, to the relation between the sexes, to marriage, and to the family.  
When the meaning of fundamentals is not clear, then everything of real human importance is plunged into confusion. Everything becomes relative or subjective. In Veritatis splendor, John Paul speaks of "the most dangerous crisis which can afflict man: the confusion between good and evil" (93) - which is also the confusion between truth and falsehood, between right and wrong, and ultimately between what is truly human and humanizing and what is inhuman and dehumanizing [47].  
Our subject is marriage and the family. Marriage is clearly in crisis in our modern world. In the present chapter we want to examine more particularly the reasons why.  
What is wrong with marriage today? If, as seems obvious, marriage is one of the most natural things in human society, if the tendency towards marriage is one of the most natural things in man and woman, it seems hard to suppose that in any normal state of affairs it is natural for marriage to go so wrong. If marriage is going wrong so often today, perhaps we are not in a normal state of affairs about marriage. Could it not be that, rather than marriage going wrong for man, it is man who has gone wrong about marriage? Is it not possible that the fault does not lie with marriage but with modern man and woman, and specifically with his or her approach to marriage?  
I think so, and I see at least three major points where the contemporary approach to marriage has gone wrong:  
a) the tendency to "deify" human love; to expect from human love what any believer knows that only God can give;  
b) the tendency to expect to receive a lot of love, without having to give as much - or more - love to one's spouse, to one's children.  
c) the tendency to see opposition (or at best an accidental connection) between the two ends of marriage, the good of the spouses and procreation, instead of seeing them as complementary to one another [48].  
Let us examine each one of these points a little more closely.

What only God can give  
Our main hope is the hope of happiness. We are made for happiness and must necessarily seek it. But we are only going to find frustration if we look for happiness where it is not to be found...; or look for unlimited happiness where only limited happiness can be found...; or look for happiness where it can be found but not in the way in which it can be found there.  
Happiness can be found in marriage, but not unlimited happiness; to ask perfect happiness of marriage is to ask too much. Nevertheless, the human person is made with a capacity and thirst for unlimited happiness. And that is why it has been so well said that "woman promises to man what only God can give". Any believer knows that the perfect happiness we seek can only be found in God. We also know that such perfect happiness is not possible in any real or lasting way here on earth. It can only be found in heaven. But the unbeliever, or the half-believer, forgets this. And when man begins to forget God and to lose the hope of eternal life, his heart centres on earthly things and tries to satisfy its thirst for happiness in them. It cannot. Not even in marriage which of all human things promises most happiness and should be capable of giving it. But it cannot give enough.  
The person who remembers this will look for happiness in marriage, but will not look for perfect happiness, for he knows that is to look for what it cannot give. The person who forgets God will tend to "deify" human love, and to do so is to practically guarantee the failure of human love. Love is fundamental in marriage, but love can be both misunderstood and over-rated. If one expects too much from love and marriage, one is bound to be disappointed. If one puts too much pressure on a beam, it breaks. If one asks too much of marriage, it collapses. So many modern divorces have their explanation right here.

Marriage: getting or giving?  
We have already stressed the idea of self-giving as being at the heart of married love. The person who is not prepared to give of himself, the best of himself, is not prepared for marriage, and will not find the happiness that marriage can provide. We have already seen how this means learning to give oneself to one's spouse, defects and all; and how both spouses must learn to give themselves to their children, the love-fruit of that mutual self-gift so uniquely represented by their conjugal union.  
The less this firm disposition to give is present, the less happiness will be forthcoming from marriage. "How much must I give?", "how much will I have to give?"... Once these calculations are allowed to enter, love has embarked on a deadend. Calculation and love do not go, or will not survive, together. Happiness cannot be bought nor is it the result of calculations. Can I afford the amount of generosity that married happiness will call for? That is something you cannot work out by calculation; you can only try.  
At the very start of married life, the calculated analysis ("Am I getting as much as I am giving?") is less likely to be consciously present although it is almost certain to arise later on, and if not consciously resisted, can eat away the heart of married love. Today, however, there is another type of calculated approach to marriage that can be consciously present in each spouse and in fact be shared by both. It also involves a deliberate restriction in spousal self-giving and so can take on the form of a consented threat to their married happiness.  
***Children: "optional extras" in marriage?***  
Here is another main reason why marriage so often goes wrong for modern man: his tendency to think that the enjoyment of sexual love is the main purpose, or even the whole and all-sufficient purpose, of marriage, at the same time as the possibility of children - of one or two children - can be reduced to a mere factor which most couples may well want as part of their self-fulfillment, though other couples, with equal legitimacy, will perhaps prefer one or two cars or one or two homes...  
For many people today children are to marriage what accessories are to motor-cars: "optional extras". Count them in if you like them or can afford them. If not, the marriage - like the car - can work perfectly well without them. To this the Christian mind flatly says No [49]. The deliberate debarring of children, in whole or in part, is almost certain to make any marriage work badly. This is a truth - a rule or law of life - which is in fact implicit in the Church's teaching about the ends of marriage and the relationship between them.  
Since contemporary man has little evidence for thinking that modern philosophies of marriage are correct, he might do well to re-examine the Church's teaching - that "marriage and conjugal love are by their nature ordained toward the procreation and education of children" [50] - and her claim that this teaching represents the really natural view of marriage. It might help if we pointed out, to begin with, that most of those who think the Church is wrong in this teaching have not properly understood what in fact the Church is teaching. We referred earlier to how easily people can confuse and even oppose the subjective and the objective ends of marriage. Now we must stress how important it is that they not only keep them distinct but also learn to harmonize them.  
The main motive most people have for marrying is undoubtedly love: "Why do I want to marry this person, rather than anyone else? Because I'm in love with him or her." That is clear. If having children enters, as a motive for marrying, it normally enters as a secondary motive, and in certain cases today it may not even enter at all.  
Now, with this order of motives for marrying - first, love; secondarily (if at all), children - many people may conclude that a successful or happy marriage is dependent on the same factors and in the same order; in other words, that happiness in marriage depends mainly or even exclusively upon their mutual love and secondarily or not at all on having children. Is there any evidence to show that this conclusion is correct?

The Church and human happiness  
People are not wrong to marry for love. People are not wrong to hope for happiness from marriage. But people may be wrong if they stake all their hopes for married happiness on just one factor - mutual love - when nature has designed that happiness to result from the delicate and exacting interplay of two factors: love (which, we repeat, means dedication, self-giving) and children. In other words, people may be wrong or go wrong because they have not understood how marriage is meant to work, because they have not grasped the way marriage is meant to fulfil its possibilities, including its possibility of happiness.  
This is where the Church's teaching can set them right. The Church is fully conscious that the truth she is upholding - in her constant magisterium about marriage - is the truth entrusted to her by Christ; and therefore that it is not in her power to alter or fail to proclaim this truth. At the same time, however, she is equally conscious that her view of marriage takes all of its natural elements into account, including that promise of happiness which it seems to offer to man. When she joins her children together in matrimony, the Church is the first to rejoice at their love and happiness. The Divine Master is always a willing guest if he is invited to the marriage feast; with his presence he wishes to confirm the joy of Cana. But it is to him that a young couple must look if they want the wine of their present happiness to grow richer and flow more abundantly, and never to run out or sour into vinegar [51]. When our Lord speaks to them - in Scripture, teaching that they are now "one flesh" and "shall not be separated", that they should "increase and multiply"; or through his church, (again in words of Vatican II) that "marriage and conjugal love are by their nature ordained toward the begetting and educating of children" [52] - he also has their happiness in mind: not only their eternal happiness (though that is what essentially matters) but also that relative but very real happiness here on earth that they can attain and he wants them to attain.

Married love is meant to become family love  
Perhaps we can put it this way. It seems evidently a part of the natural order that man and woman should see a promise of happiness in marriage. Now if, as the Church teaches, having children, precisely as the result of the love-union of the spouses, is also part of the natural order, then - unless nature is lying or at least inconsistent - happiness in marriage is likely to depend on having and rearing children as much as on the mutual love between husband and wife and its expressions. It undoubtedly depends on both factors, but the teaching of the Church would seem to suggest that, in the long run, children - born of generous love - have a decisive influence in determining the outcome of a happy marriage.  
Now if someone objects that this is absurd, being tantamount to saying that something physiological (procreation) is more important than something spiritual (love), I would answer that it is tantamount to saying no such thing. It is to say something quite different: which is that love in marriage, which is certainly wider than mere physical love, is wider also than mere married love; in other words, love in marriage is not meant to remain (and is not likely to survive if it does remain) just the love of two people for each other. It is meant to broaden, to spread out, to include more. Married love is really designed to become family love. The love of husband and wife is meant to grow and, in growing, to extend to and embrace others, who will be precisely the fruit of that love. "Fecundity is the fruit and the sign of conjugal love, the living testimony of the full reciprocal selfgiving of the spouses" (John Paul II: Familiaris consortio, 28); "True mutual love transcends the community of husband and wife, and reaches out to its natural fruit, the children" (St. Josemaría Escrivá, Conversations, no. 94). And this brings us to the third point of our considerations.

Calculated happiness  
An age that does not see children as a natural consequence of married love, may be on its way towards seeing them as its natural enemy. That is why I have suggested that a third main reason why so many marriages do not work out today is the growing modern tendency not only to put mutual love before children, but to see actual opposition between these two aspects of marriage instead of seeing them as complementary.  
Under the influence of birth-control thinking and propaganda many people today have fallen into the idea that human happiness in marriage depends essentially on love, and much less so, if at all, on paternity. I wonder how many are aware that this idea can be just the first in a series of steps by which a person may be carried forward - much farther than he or she had originally anticipated or wanted - by a philosophy which has its own powerful momentum and direction.  
Let us analyze a little deeper this first step in the birth-control philosophy, and see how it easily leads people on - down a path of calculation, rather than up one of love.  
The first principle of this modern "philosophy" of marriage, then, is that love is the essential and all sufficient constituent of married happiness, and children, therefore, are to be regarded as a possible help - but also as a possible hindrance - to that love. For children make demands, and there is being popularized today a concept of love that does not want to have demands made of it. With this mentality, when love is thought of above all in terms of personal satisfaction (and not of rising towards an ideal, or of self-giving, with all this implies of struggle and sacrifice), then a vague hankering after paternity may not be enough to outweigh the "disadvantages" of children. This is becoming especially true in the case of women among whom there is a growing tendency to feel that the burdens of pregnancy and child-rearing are just too high a price to pay for the possible satisfactions that may derive from them.  
Happiness is the result of a generous dedication to someone or something worthwhile. It is the result of giving oneself without counting the cost. Happiness is not something that can be purchased for money, or obtained through calculation. Yet the whole of this modern philosophy of marriage is becoming replete with calculations, practically all of them cold, and many of them quite selfish and quite mistaken.  
The first calculation is, as we have seen, that two people suffice to make each other happy. The second calculation is that a certain number of children - one or two - may be a help to that happiness; or may equally be a hindrance... The third calculation - which is beginning to have the force of a dogma for many today - is that more than a certain number of children (two or three at a maximum) will certainly run counter to married love and happiness. Now, evidently, once one concludes that a particular number of children - four, for instance - is bound to be inimical to love, one can easily end up regarding any number - even one - as an enemy. This is simply the logic of contraceptive marriage.  
Once two people have begun to believe that they are "made for one another", they may end up believing that they are not made for anyone else, and have no need for anyone else; that anyone else - even their child, and even especially their child - may be a rival to their love. One or other, or both, may anticipate - and refuse to accept - the possibility of the child's absorbing part of the love which their partner has hitherto given exclusively to them. It is of course a fact that most husbands and wives, on becoming parents, feel a certain jealousy when they sense themselves no longer the exclusive object of their partner's affections. It is natural to experience some passing motions of jealousy in this sense, just as it is natural to overcome them. What is not natural, when one has anticipated this new possible polarization or broadening out of one's partner's love, is to want to avoid having the child that will cause it. This is simply possessiveness and selfish grasping: the very antithesis of love.  
Sexual love and procreation are joined in God's plans, to form a strong natural support for marriage and happiness. Man can certainly set apart what God has joined together. But this unnatural separation may leave married love without support. And marriage without its natural support logically collapses.  
Those who believe that the birth-control philosophy favors marriage and love would do well therefore to look to its possible ultimate consequences. These have been well parodied in Aldous Huxley's Brave New World, that satire of a soulless future society which now looks much less impossible and remote than when Huxley conceived it before World War II. That liberated vision of planned things to come - love and sex identified (or rather, love smothered and lost in uncontrolled animal instinct); marriage excluded and abolished ("everyone belongs to everyone else"): children (repopulating) reduced to laboratory processes, in the safe and exclusive hands of the State - is just the fantastic (but ultimate) projection of the birth-control philosophy.  
When the Church teaches that married love is ordered to procreation, it would be a crass error to interpret this ordering of mutual love to procreation as if it implied a slighting attitude on the Church's part towards love. The Church is not opposing one aspect of marriage to another. It is modern man who is doing that. The Church sees the intimate harmony between all the natural aspects of marriage - its objective purposes as well as its subjective motives. To indicate that one thing is ordained to another is to give the key to its true nature. And so the Church, in teaching that mutual love in marriage is ordered to procreation, far from slighting human love, is giving us the key to nature's plan for the fulfilment, within marriage, of the great expectations of human love.

Love's greatest project - children  
Nature has designed married love to be fruitful (Humanae vitae, 9). Fruitfulness, in other words, is natural to love. It is something that love naturally longs for, so much so that love feels frustrated if it cannot bear fruit.  
Love always inspires; it dreams of great things even when it is unrequited. Requited love - love that has been answered by love - no longer just dreams of great things; it yearns with the ambition and feels the strength to carry them out.  
Love enables a young couple to find a thrill of happiness in situations where those not in love experience no more than boredom and routine. To thrill them, it is enough that they can do or choose something - almost anything - together, and that what they do or choose represents the fruit of a loving decision: the meeting point of two wills in love. As they await their wedding-day, an engaged couple work happily on so many projects - minor and even trivial projects, in themselves - that will help to make up their new life together. They enthusiastically plan and choose the apartment they are going to live in, the type of furniture they will have, the very colour of carpets or curtains...  
Is it possible, then, for them not to thrill together with enthusiasm at the major project that nature has reserved for them, a project that will be uniquely theirs and exclusive to their union; a project that will be no mere choice of something material - like a car or a video - but a genuine creation on their part (with God's collaboration) of living beings, their own children...? Other couples may live in houses identical to theirs, or may choose the same model car or television set, or much more expensive ones... No one but they can have their children.  
How could a couple not look on the project of their children as the greatest and most precious of all their projects, since they can see that it alone - among them all - is the direct fruit of their most intimate married union, fruit of the union not only of their wills but also of their bodies? And as they reflect on all of this, is it possible that they should fail to understand the greatness and sacredness of God's plan for marriage?  
"The only true Christian marriage is that of two persons - normally two young persons, on the threshold of life and possessed of all the vitality of youth - who surrender themselves to one another, so as to undertake the greatest enterprise of their mutual perfectioning and the enterprise of the family whose summit is the child, in whom the parents meet each other anew, in whom they find their continuity and who, in the unity of its being, expresses their union" [53]. "The spouses who love one another, love everything that brings them together and unites them. They hold nothing in common so much as their own child. They may share their fortune and unite their possessions in one; they may be united by the most heartfelt understanding. Nevertheless, nothing is so common to them and nothing unites them as their child... A united couple continue to love one another in their child. In him they discover not only themselves, but their very union, the oneness that they have made it their lifetask to achieve. Each of them recognizes his beloved in the child in whom he sees a new being that owes him everything and that he also loves with a love that is inseparable from his partner's love which has equally been the source of this new life. And so, in fatherhood and motherhood, a marriage finds its perfect flourishing. The child uniquely expresses the enrichment of being that husband and wife seek in their union" [54].  
That is why a young couple in love - if they understand love as meaning something more than the mere gratification of instinct - are not satisfied with a barren union. If children are the natural fruit of married love, the married love that does not bear that fruit - when it can do so - frustrates itself and may soon wither and die. Its danger is self-suffocation, for it must try to survive in a closed and unnatural atmosphere where it has deprived itself of the breath of life.  
If nature has designed married love to be fruitful, we can say that it has also designed that growth in love will normally be in function of growth in fruitfulness. The couple that expects their love to grow while at the same time they neglect or frustrate its fruitfulness are denaturalizing their marriage. They have not understood the way that marriage can normally give happiness and are not likely to find the happiness that their marriage could have given them. Their love, without the protection and strength it is meant to draw from children, can easily give way before the pressures of life.

Every marriage passes through a crisis  
I do not think it is hard to follow nature's plan which has designed children to be not only the fruit but also the safeguard of mutual love between the spouses, and the mainstay of their married happiness.  
Each marriage comes to a critical period, a turning point towards a fuller and more definitive good, or towards bad. That moment can come quite early on - as soon as easy romance fades, which may often be no more than a year or two after marriage. If a couple does not negotiate that critical moment properly, their marriage will begin to go downhill. Mutual understanding and respect will lessen; rows will become more frequent. They will have begun the gradual process of drifting apart that can end in final estrangement ten or fifteen years later.  
I would say that a double need must be satisfied if a marriage is to survive this period of crisis. When that testing time arrives, each spouse needs, in the first place, a major motive to help them to be loyal to the other person despite his or her defects, a motive sufficient to keep them working at the task of learning to love the other person.  
And each one needs, in the second place, a powerful motive to improve personally: to become a less self-centred, a more lovable person. It is easy to see in children nature's special way of providing both motives.  
How to keep loving when love becomes difficult  
The first point - the need to keep loving when the discovery of mutual defects starts making marital love difficult - was mentioned in our last chapter. But our present context can help us go deeper into the matter.  
In Heaven, God and the saints love without effort. But earth is not Heaven. Love on earth is seldom easy; and if it is easy for a time, the easiness does not tend to last. It is true that there must indeed be a great depth of goodness in each human person, for God loves each of us with an immense love and God only loves what is good. But we are not God, and at times we find it hard to discover the good points in other people. In fact we often seem to have a greater facility for seeing people's defects than their virtues. This specially happens when two people share life as closely and constantly as in marriage. And it happens above all if, in their shared life, they have remained alone. Two people constantly face to face are going to discover far more defects in each other than two people who are looking together at their children.  
When little difficulties in getting on begin to crop up, the thought of their children - if there are children - should easily and naturally arise as a main motive in determining husband or wife to be faithful to their marriage vows. "For better or for worse", they promised years ago... It will clearly be worse, for the children, if their parents don't learn to get along. "For richer or for poorer"...; the children will clearly be poorer if they live in a disunited or a broken home. Can any stronger motives exist for a couple than the responsibility and love they have towards their children - to encourage and push and compel them to be faithful, whatever the cost, whatever their feelings, whatever the state of their nerves, whatever efforts, however extraordinary, they may have to make? It may certainly be tough on them to make those efforts, but a moment's reflection should tell them that if they are not prepared to make them, it is going to be much tougher on their children.  
There is the first motive, and nature's way of supplying it. "For our children's sake, we must learn to get along. And therefore I will fight with all my strength to keep loving my partner. And, with God's grace, I will succeed".

Learning to be a more lovable person, through sacrifice  
The husband or wife who reacts so is already improving as a person. And this brings us directly to the second point. If love is to survive in marriage each spouse must learn to love the other, with his or her defects. But if love is not just to survive, but to grow, then each spouse must be able discover virtues - new virtues or increased virtues - in the other.  
If love is to grow in marriage, the other person must appear as more and more lovable. And he (or she) will not unless he is improving, unless he is actually turning into a better person.  
On the natural level, generosity and self-giving are what make a person better and more lovable. And it is selfishness that kills love both in the selfish person himself as well as in those who have contact with him or her.  
The person in love needs to be able to sacrifice himself for the loved one, if he himself is to become more lovable. The person incapable of sacrifice is incapable of giving or receiving (or retaining) much love.  
It is good that each spouse sacrifices himself for the other. But it is doubtful, on a natural level, if any husband or wife can, alone, inspire their partner indefinitely to generosity and self-sacrifice.  
We have said that the person in love needs to be able to sacrifice himself for the loved one, if he himself is to become more lovable. We should add that the loved one, in nature's plan for marriage, includes children. Children can and do draw from parents a degree of sacrifice to which neither parent, alone, could probably inspire the other. "A man most easily rises above himself for the sake of his children. Parental love is the most naturally disinterested kind of love" [55]. In this way, as they sacrifice themselves for their children, each parent actually improves and becomes - in their spouse's eyes also - truly a more lovable person. "For the sake of their children, spouses rise above themselves, and above a limited view of their own happiness. Moral stature is only acquired if one rises above oneself. Children, above all, are what spur a couple on to moral greatness" [56].

Marriage has need of sacrifice  
On the other hand, if a couple leave untapped the capacity for sacrifice stored in their paternal or maternal instincts, they are likely to end up, at best, as half-developed persons, half-lovable persons. And that may not be good enough for the survival of their marriage.  
The fact is that sacrifice is a positive need for married life. In particular all the sacrifice that children demand of their parents from their earliest years is a major factor designed by nature to mature and develop and unite the parents. It is good that the husband and wife sacrifice themselves for each other. But it is even better that both together make sacrifices for their children. Shared sacrifice is one of the best bonds of love.  
When love is left without support...  
It seems to me that one of the most obvious, frequent and saddest mistakes of many young couples today embarking on marriage is the decision to postpone having any children for a number of years - two or three or five - after getting married. The result is that precisely in that moment when romance starts to fade, when their love begins to run into difficulties and needs support, the main support which nature had thought of (had "planned", I would say) for that moment - their children - does not exist.  
***Shared selfishness is no basis for happiness***  
I know that many young couples want to enjoy themselves for a number of years. They feel too young for settling down to family life, and prefer to combine what they consider the advantages of married life with the continued attractions of the social life to which they have become accustomed. Can this be seriously regarded as a natural approach to marriage? Does it not look too much to what marriage offers in the way of enjoyment and too little to what it implies in the way of commitment, and indeed of adventure? May there not be as much of shared selfishness as of shared love in such an approach? When all is said and done, "to have a good time together" is not much of an ideal for two people to share, and is certainly not capable of holding them together, in love, for a lifetime.  
At times one gets the impression that many young couples today are planning for a marriage where the need for sacrifice will be reduced to a minimum and, if possible, absolutely eliminated. The saddest thing about this is that a couple who want a marriage without sacrifice, want a marriage where they will eventually lose respect for one another.  
When is one mature enough to start a family?  
Other couples argue that a few years of married live together will help them mature more and so be better prepared for starting and rearing a family. But what, it may be asked, is there in such a shared life together - with its minimum of burdens - that is really maturing them? The moment when a couple is best prepared for starting a family is the moment when they have married. The romance that still accompanies those early years of married life will help them face up more readily and cheerfully to the sacrifices that children demand. This romantic and more idealistic love is actually designed by nature to facilitate the process by which a couple matures in sacrifice. Later on, it will not be so easy and may not work. If they leave having their first children for later on - when romantic love perhaps no longer accompanies them - the dedication and sacrifice children require may prove too much, precisely because they have not matured enough.  
If two young people in love don't want to start a family, they would be wise not to try to start a marriage. It's too likely to fail. One might compare it to starting a car, while leaving its generator belt somehow stuck and motionless. The car may run all right for a while, but in the end its motor is bound to seize up...

The most experienced family planner  
It would be a funny world if nature were not in fact the best and wisest Family Planner. She is certainly the planner with the longest experience. The results of modern - artificial and anti-natural - family planning are beginning to be abundantly clear: more and more crumbling marriages, more and more broken homes, more and more isolated people... Those young couples who are tempted to trust the demographers or the politicians or the sociologists, rather than nature, those who are tempted to bend to social pressures or to the simple desire for an easy life rather than heed their instincts of paternity, would do well to ask themselves if they really believe - on the evidence - that modern family planning seems to be making for happier marriages, or whether the plan of nature is not more farseeing and more likely to provide the support for a strong and lasting married life and married love.

Self-enrichment in marriage  
Those who maintain that the main purpose of marriage is the enrichment of the spouses' personalities, their self-fulfillment as they complement one another through their mutual love, should also be prepared to say what in fact personal fulfilment implies. Their meaning, presumably, is that marriage is meant to make a fuller human person of each spouse: to make a fuller man or a fuller woman, of husband or wife. But it would help if they went on to say in what this fuller humanity consists: in a greater capacity of understanding? a greater spirit of sacrifice or self-giving? a more developed self-control?... Or (I am assuming that they would not maintain it consists in a greater dependence on physical sex) would they suggest that it consists in a greater concern precisely with self, accompanied by a growing indifference towards others?...  
Pope Paul VI's words are worth reflecting on in this connection. A married love that is fully human, he insists, is "a compound of sense and spirit. It is not, then, merely a question of natural instinct or emotional drive. It is also, and above all, an act of the free will, whose dynamism ensures that not only does it endure through the joys and sorrows of daily life, but also that it grows, so that husband and wife become in a way one heart and one soul, and together attain their human fulfilment" [57].

Dictatorial pressures  
We would return to the suggestion with which we began: that it is not marriage that has gone wrong for modern man, it is modern man who has gone wrong about marriage. He has abused it, and it no longer works in his service.  
For long some people were crying, "We have the right to be happy in marriage without being dictated to by the Church". If the cry is echoed today, it is with a hollow tone, for the very people who pay least heed to the teachings of the Church are those who are finding least happiness in marriage.  
There is dictation today - and dictatorial pressure - about marriage. But it is not coming from the Church. It is coming from the State, from the social planners, from the economic experts, or from the philosophers of a pervasive hedonism or an aimless libertarianism.  
It is no wonder if these man-imposed plans for marriage end in failure, for marriage is not man's idea, but God's; and it can work - and give happiness - only if it is lived according to God's plans.  
People have indeed the right to expect happiness from marriage, but only from the type of marriage that nature instituted, and only when it is lived, with God's grace, in accordance with its natural design and its natural laws. Not to respect that design or those laws is to denaturalize what was made to help man towards his happiness and salvation, and to turn it - sooner or later - into a source of his misery and frustration.  
Marriage is in crisis, and seems to be in decline in many modern societies. Nevertheless, one meets with so many exceptions, so many cases of happy marriages that are happy homes, because the parents have not frustrated the noble instincts of parenthood that nature has given them. They have, on the contrary, fulfilled those instincts, and fulfilled them generously, in the conviction that "a truly noble married love aspires, with a courageous heart, to the glory of fruitfulness. But there is no glory in a strained and calculated fruitfulness. Glory lies in an abundant fruitfulness, in the longing for that abundance. If it feels the need for reasons, it is not in order to have children, but in order to limit their number" [58].  
The number is constantly growing of married couples who have understood the greatness of the divine plan in which God, by calling them to marriage, has given them a share. And so, strengthened by grace, they have been able to face up to the sacrifices - sacrifices of love - that love itself needs for its very survival.

5. Divorce: the spouses  
As noted in our Introduction, divorce is regarded today by most persons in Western countries as one of the marks of a progressive society. We now propose to look further into this, with special insistence on the point that divorce can logically be regarded as progress only if one is convinced that it is a means to greater human happiness.  
Does divorce bring about more happiness? Does it make for happier persons, for happier families and happier societies? If in fact it makes the majority of people happier, even though it may perhaps leave a minority less happy, then one can perhaps reasonably maintain that it represents progress. But if it is the other way round, if it makes a minority happier but makes the majority less and less happy, then divorce represents the opposite of progress. I suggest that this in fact is the actual situation and, moreover, that one can check this for oneself by means of a little clear thinking plus a look at a few concrete facts.  
That marriage is indissoluble of its nature was taught explicitly by Jesus Christ (cf. Mt. 19:8-9). Our Lord's teaching has been re-echoed and solemnly confirmed time and again by the Catholic Church [59]. The Church therefore teaches that every true marriage (whether sacramental or not) is indissoluble. My purpose is not to restate this unvarying teaching, but rather to suggest: (1) that divorce, even on the level of individual and earthly happi-ness, tends to do more harm than good; and (2) that indissolu-bility, far from being an enemy of human love or a restraint on human fulfillment, is meant to be their support and bulwark. The arguments backing each of these affirmations complement one another, and at times are identical. The first can be dealt with briefly enough. The second merits greater attention; in considering it we will enlarge on ideas that have already come up in the last two chapters.

Divorce breeds divorce  
Divorce does not tend to make for happiness. Divorce tends to make for divorce; and divorce always marks the final collapse of a hope of happiness. Divorce, it is frequently argued, is only meant for the hard cases - for those persons whose marriages have in fact failed - , so as to give them the chance to start again. The evidence, however, is becoming massive that the remedy is worse than the illness.  
Divorce is not curing hard cases; it is creating them. Divorce breeds divorce; and it breeds and multiplies fast. It is a simple matter of fact that once divorce is allowed in a society, its incidence spirals upwards. The following figures bring out how the matter developed in the U.S.A. over two thirty year periods from 1900 to 1960. They show the relationship between the number of marriages celebrated and the number of divorces granted in the same year: the relationship, so to speak, between the number of marriages "made" and those "unmade" in a given year.  
Year Marriages Divorces % of divorces  
to marriages  
1900 709,000 56,000 8%  
1930 1,127,000 196,000 17%  
1960 1,527,000 395,000 26% []

The upward spiral continued and accelerated dramatically. The 1960 proportion had all but doubled only 15 years later. In 1975, the number of marriages was 2,126,000, and of divorces, 1,026,000 [61]: practically a 50% proportion. One divorce for every two marriages celebrated!  
This can scarcely be described as a picture of increasing human happiness. It rather gives clear evidence of growing human failure and isolation. Of all natural institutions, marriage - with its hope of a love that is stable, deep and permanent - surely offers the greatest promise of happiness. If, in divorcist societies, up to 50% of persons who marry fail to find happiness in marriage, where are they going to find it? In a second marriage? The statistics again say otherwise. The divorce rate among divorced persons who re-marry is three or four times higher than among those who marry for the first time.  
It is easy enough to see how the legalization of divorce tends to create a situation that drives more and more marriages on the rocks. In a society where marriage is regarded as an irrevocable step, people think twice or three times about marrying. No one enters lightly on a life-long commitment. And later on in married life, when the inevitable difficulties come, the very fact that there is no "easy way out", helps them to fight to make a go of it. In a divorcist society, it is hard for people who marry not to have the thought somewhere in the back of their minds, "If it doesn't work, I can always get a divorce". With such an approach, there is nothing definitive about the step of getting married. One is not committing one's life, one is simply trying something out, while reserving to oneself the "right" to get out of it or to get rid of it if it does not work. The divorcist mentality breeds a commercial approach to marriage. One tends from the outset to regard the whole transaction with certain misgivings, and therefore one insists on a "freedom-back-if-not-satisfied" guarantee. "Try it, just to see" may be a sound basis to a business transaction. Is it a sound basis to what should be a transaction of love? An "I'll try it, to see" approach to marriage is an essentially calculating attitude, and is almost certain to bring about failure, because one may try it, but one does not try oneself.

Indissolubility and happiness  
My second suggestion was that indissolubility is designed (by nature, by God) to make for human happiness, not to spoil it. Now, we can understand the point of indissolubility if we understand the point and purpose of marriage itself, especially that end of the "good of the spouses" which, as we saw in chapter three, church teaching now stresses so much.  
It comes down to this. Marriage is designed to make people happy by teaching them to love. Indissolubility is simply God's rule for those apprenticed to love: that they are not entitled to give up the effort to love even when it becomes difficult. Let us take a deeper look into this.  
Marriage (and indissolubility), we have just stated, should make people happy because this is part of God's design for marriage. A few evident qualifications need to be added to this statement:  
- Although marriage can and should make people happy, it cannot make them perfectly happy. Perfect happiness cannot be found here on earth. It can only be found in Heaven. So, if one insists on expecting perfect happiness from marriage, one is bound to be disappointed.  
- Second, and equally important, although marriage can make people happy, it cannot make them effortlessly happy. Happiness is not found easily; it takes an effort. Easy happiness does not last. This means there is no such thing as a happy marriage without an effort [62].  
- From the general principle, "marriage should make people happy", one should not too quickly or too easily draw the particular conclusion, "marriage should make me happy". If made in strict logic, the conclusion follows. But if made - as it so often is - in a spirit of impatience, self-pity, bitterness or indignation, it is almost certainly proceeds less from logic than from self-centeredness. And marriage, if approached self-centeredly, is just not going to work - that is, it is not going to make anyone happy.  
Each one of these points, especially the last, merits some further comment.  
Marriage cannot give perfect happiness. That is not its purpose. Its purpose, one needs to insist, is not to give the spouses perfect happiness, but to mature them for perfect happiness. In everything here on earth, God is trying to teach us to love - so that we will be able to enjoy Heaven fully. Marriage is one of his most intensive schools of love, and the one where He tries to train most of his pupils.  
This is where the second point comes in. If marriage takes an effort, it is because love takes an effort. Love is no easy subject to learn; just the contrary. The reason for its difficulty lies in the fact that we are all strongly self-centered. Love, true love, is other-centered. As a result, the average self-centered person (that is, all of us) has to overcome his or her selfishness in order to be able to love. And this means a constant effort and struggle: a struggle that can go up and down, see-saw like. Love will grow only if self-centeredness is lessened. If selfishness remains, love cannot grow. If selfish-ness grows, love declines and can die. Love seldom dies a natural death. If it dies, the reason is usually that it has been murdered: killed by self-love.  
We are strongly self-centered, but not totally so. We have in fact a real hankering and need for true love, for other-centeredness. But it is true that in practically all marriages, each of the spouses starts out with a much larger dose of self-centeredness than of other-centeredness.  
But - it may be objected - surely two people who marry are usually very much in love, and therefore very "other-centered"? Perhaps they are, perhaps they are not; time alone will tell. How is it that so many persons who, on marrying, regarded their partner as the "only one in the world", eight or ten years later "can't stand" him or her, and get divorced? Their love "died", we are told; and divorce is the only logical step once love has died. We will consider in a moment what may be the best thing to do, if love has "died". But let us not proceed too soon. We could profitably do a post-mortem on this married love that - we are told - has just died, remembering again that if love dies, it seldom dies a sudden death.  
Love, at the time of the marriage, was aglow with health. Through what peculiar process of consumption and decline has it passed that one or both of the spouses want to write its obituary notice ten or fifteen years later? Was it, after all, not as strong and healthy as appeared at the start? Probably not. Love seldom starts strong, for at the start one seldom knows the other person well and deeply, as he or she really is (a mixture, like all of us, of good points and bad points).  
What starts strong is romance. But romance tends to idealize the other person. It therefore is not really other-centered, for it is centered not on the real other, but on an "other" seen through rose-tinted glasses that reflect an image peculiarly pleasing to the viewer. Romance, in other words, is perfectly compatible with a large dose of self-centeredness.  
Romance is pleasant and easy. It can give love an initial push to get it going, but it is not the same as love. And when the easy momentum that romance produces runs out, love - if it is there - has to keep going on its own. It is easy to "fall in love". To be in love, to remain in love, to stand in love, without falling "out" of it: all of this is difficult.  
Romantic love sees no defects in the other person. Real love should see them, or at least be convinced that they are there and will appear. And real love must obviously love the other person with his or her defects: love him or her, that is, as he or she really is. That is anything but easy [63].  
A profession of love that is equivalent to "I love you provided you have no defects" is not love at all. It is the same as saying, "I'll love you provided you don't turn out to be a real person..."; and clearly, the love that is only prepared to love a fictional person is a fictional love. To put it another way: "I'll love you provided you have no defects" is the same as saying, "I'll love you provided I don't have to make an effort to love you..." - which is the approach of simple and sheer selfishness, no more.

Attaching conditions to love  
That is why any conditions attached to love (especially the condition implied in allowing for the possibility of divorce) are a sign that self-centeredness is present, and well settled into a good defensive position. "I'll love you until such and such a date - and always provided I don't meet someone who attracts me more before then": that sounds like a good, straightforward, cards-on-the-table, commercial approach. It does not sound like love.  
If marriage is viewed as a satisfaction-producing machine, the moment it is no longer gives satisfaction, it has essentially failed and should be replaced; just as one replaces any other machine, such as a television set or a car, that no longer works satisfactorily. But is it the marriage that has failed, or is it the husband or the wife, or both of them?... When the car breaks down irremediably, was it destined to be a dud from the start, or was it simply the victim of bad driving? And how long will a new car last in the hands of the same driver unless he or she learns to drive properly?  
You have to learn to love. You have to work at it. It takes time. And it can get harder as one goes on. But if one perseveres, one learns. This after all is the way we approach other major aspects of life, such as a business or a profession. The vast majority of people are quite convinced that to be successful as a doctor or lawyer or accountant, one has to study at some school or university for years; and, after graduation, still keep studying. And that even then, with years and years of constant learning and effort, one may still not achieve all the profess-ional success one had expected. The peculiar thing is that the same people appear to expect instant and effortless success or happiness in marriage; and when the need for effort emerges, they (if they have absorbed the divorcist mentality) seem to think that the reasonable thing is to quit. It is not the reasonable thing. It would be just as reasonable to quit studying medicine at a particular univer-sity because one found the effort to master physiology or pharmacology too exacting, and to look around for another university where one could become a doctor without having to tire oneself studying these subjects. Even if such a person, by some fluke, graduated from some strange medical school, could he or she be anything but a failure as a doctor? Similarly, the person not prepared to make the effort to love - to learn to love - can only end up a failure as a husband or wife.  
Happiness demands an effort. Marriage demands an effort. When a person in difficulties allows the thought, "I'll get a divorce and marry this other man [woman], because I'll be happier with him [her]", what she [or he] is really saying, without realizing it, is: "My happiness depends on not having too much demanded of me. I'll be happy only if I don't have to give too much, only if I don't have to come out of myself, only if I don't have to make much of an effort to love"... The person who thinks this way can never be happy. The reason is clear. Happiness is a consequence of giving: "it is happier to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). Happiness is not possible, inside or outside marriage, for the person who is determined to get more than he or she is prepared to give.  
Indissolubility, then, is really God's law for would-be quitters [64]: for those who get tired of the demands of love and fidelity and are tempted to chicken out. God says No; He says, "Keep at it". The happiness game, which is no cakewalk, is demandingly but all-wisely refereed by God. When played within marriage, one of its main rules is indissolubility: you just don't quit the game when the play gets tough; if you quit, you lose.  
I repeat: there is no easy way to happiness. Those who seek divorce because of the difficulties that marriage involves, are simply balking at the difficulties that happiness involves. They are settling themselves on the road that leads away from happiness.  
The biggest enemy of love is not the other person's selfishness, but one's own selfishness. One can run away from the other person, but one's own selfishness runs with one... After all, it is possible to love a selfish person (God does). But it may be impossible for a selfish person to love.  
The intervening decades scarcely call for a modification of the judgments of an article, "The Divorced Woman" published in 1967 (when divorce was still regarded as a social problem and not taken simply as a routine fact of life). It pointed out how the divorcee is, self-confessedly, more selfish and more independent, though at the same time more self-conscious and socially more maladjusted: more defensive, less expectant of happiness, sadder... "Her 'tristesse' is revealed in the incidence of divorced women seeking psychoanalysis, in their rate of alcoholism (one in four), and suicide (three times that of married women)" [65].

Jealousy  
Some element of jealousy is proper to married life [66]. Since the spouses belong to each other, a possessive attitude towards the other is logical enough. However, the devil well knows how easily that natural possessiveness can lead to groundless suspicions which, if not checked, may ruin a good marriage (remember Othello). Suspicions should be rejected. Detective work, to discover if something is really happening, tends to undermine further whatever remains of confidence and love.  
But what if some real infidelity has in fact occurred? What to do? Forgive! And set out to restore love. The spouse sinned against will be hurt, of course. So, what? Realize that it is one's own pride which has been hurt; and that if one gives way to the reaction of pride (I'll never forgive, I'll get my own back, I'll even have an affair myself), everything will be lost.  
It is not enough just to forgive; one has to restore love. Or should one never forgive what may have been just a passing weakness on the other's part? Most times, it is necessary to go deeper still, and look into one's own recent behavior toward one's spouse. Have I been truly caring towards him or her? Has he or she always found a warm and welcoming smile in me - especially when I am annoyed by their lateness coming home, by their forgetfulness in this or that? Surely that is the spirit I had before marriage when I was hoping to win their love? Is there not a danger that love, once won, can be neglected? Is it surprising if it then declines; and whose fault is it? Forgiveness is the only way to restore injured love. More love, not less, is the only way to overcome what has been or is suspected to be a lack of love, or a sin against love. The person who does not understand this is proud, and will tend towards the isolation that all pride brings with it.

Bringing love back  
The conjugal instinct which draws people to marry and makes them work for a happy marriage, also tends to make them work toward healing a wounded marriage or mending a broken one.  
"I no longer love my husband (or my wife). My love for him (or her) has gone..." Your love for him or her, which has gone, can come back. But, for this to happen, you have to learn to forgive. If you had forgiven earlier (and perhaps also if you had asked for forgive-ness), your love would not have died. It is not quarrels between husband and wife that destroy married love; it is the failure to make them up: the inability to forgive and to ask for forgive-ness. Quarrels (even big ones) made up, do not destroy love; they can even cement it. Quarrels (even small ones) not made up, gradually poison married life and make it seem intolerable.  
The love you once had has died. How much was it worth to you in the past? By what sacrifices did you show your sense of its worth? What did you do then to protect it? And - what is perhaps more important - how much are you prepared to give now in order to bring it back to life? Love can be kept alive, but not without sacrifice. Love can be brought back to life, but not without sacrifice.  
"But - I'm not interested in reviving that love. My marriage was a failure, and I just don't care any longer for him or her". Very probably that statement is not true. Married love is a great treasure: too great a treasure to be lost without regret. Go back to that conjugal instinct that led you to marry, and try to revive it in its purity and idealism and generosity.  
The instinct to marry, after all, is not a selfish one, and few people marry out of purely selfish motives. Marriage has to be built on the generosity involved in that instinct: the generous urge to be a good husband or wife, to learn to love one's spouse, as he or she is, with his or her defects, the generous urge to swallow pride, to overlook hurtful things, to forgive and to forget. It is simply not Christian, nor is it human, to think that life is governed by an instinct always to get one's own back, to "to give tit for tat", to answer badness badly.  
There is a special memory indelibly impressed on my mind from my one visit to the Grand Canyon. It has nothing to do with the awesome grandeur of nature working on nature over thirty million years. It has to do with a very tiny bit of humanity bawling its head off in the ecologically silent bus which brought us along the southern rim of the canyon. The mother was fruitlessly using her patience to try to pacify the child. Whatever the reason for this three-year-old's rage, it erupted into a brutal climax directed precisely against her. His shrill voice spitefully articulated each word: "I - hate - you..." The shock and the hurt ripped through the bus, but the evil spell was broken by the mother's reply, which came quick and clear and true: "And - I - LOVE - you!"  
But, it will be said: that is part of human nature, it is maternal instinct to love so. Quite. But it is human nature too, it is conjugal instinct, to want to be faithful in marriage, happen what may; to react with love for husband or wife, even when he or she does something hurtful or hateful.  
The person who wins is the person who answers contempt or hate with love. Love is the secret weapon, it is always the stronger instrument; it has God's strength.  
If you want to revive married love, go back and look again for the good points you thought your partner once had, and for which you once loved him or her. It is not likely that they have completely disappeared; but you need to concentrate on re-finding them. And, for that, you need to make the effort to keep his or her bad points out of your mind.  
It can help very much if you also look for the good points which your partner's friends think he or she still has. In stress, don't seek opinion or advice about your partner from your friends: seek it from his friends, or from hers. Your friends will possibly not be able to help you to see your partner in a better and truer light; his or her friends - if you listen to them - very probably can do so.

Meaningless unions?  
And a final word about the "hopeless" cases. What to do if one's partner really seems to have no virtues left? What if the husband is an absolute alcoholic, or the wife has undergone a complete mental breakdown? Even in such circumstances I have known cases, many cases, of persons who have kept faith, who have remembered the vows that love once inspired in them: "for better or for worse, in sickness or in health", and who, seeing their partner reduced to such a sad state of sickness and poverty, have responded to the challenge and risen to a heroic height in loving.  
The charge that the Church, if it refuses a divorce in such cases, is passing a sentence of unhappiness on a husband or wife, is simply not true. Such persons will not be unhappy, though they will undoubtedly suffer, if they try to bear such a cross in close union with Christ.  
Naturally a further point must be made here. If a person feels that what is asked in such a situation is too much; if a wife, for instance, feels she can no longer live with a drunkard of a husband who physically mistreats her, then, in the last resort, separation can of course be granted.  
So the Church is not denying the right to divorce, in that sense. But she is saying: you can separate from your husband or your wife, but you are still bound to him or her. Perhaps it would be better to express it this way. It is our Lord who is in effect saying to that person: You can separate from your husband or your wife. But do not separate from me. You may feel you can no longer be happy with your partner. But you can be happy with me. Be faithful to what I ask of you. Try to administer well the talent of fidelity I have entrusted to you. And your reward will be great.  
There is no condemnation to unhappiness here. What there is, is a special call to holiness. Some people, it is true, rise to such a call well; others do not. Just as some people, stricken with cancer, rise to a new degree of love of God in accepting their illness, while others lapse into bitterness and resentment. This is simply part of the deep mystery of human freedom, and of our capacity to answer God's grace in different ways.  
The idea that once a marriage has become burdensome, it has become "meaningless" and should be done away with through divorce, shares much of the same despairing outlook on life as the attitude which readily declares the sufferings of an incurable patient to be purposeless, and would put an end to them through euthanasia. All marriages, like all sicknesses, must come to an end some time. In that sense, they are all "terminal". But none need be meaningless. All of our earthly experiences, good and bad, come to an end. Or rather, it is our crosses which come to an end; an end which, if we have tried to bear those crosses well, is the beginning of our real happiness and eternal reward.

6. Divorce: the children  
In the preceding chapter I sought to show how the marriage bond is designed to protect love, to keep the spouses' love in one piece, despite the wear and tear of daily life and the centrifugal forces of selfishness. But the unbreakable character of the marriage bond is designed not only to protect the love of the spouses, but also and specially to protect love for the children: to prevent the atmosphere of love which they need for their development and happiness from being shattered by the weakness of one or both parents, by their selfishness or by their simple lack of thought.  
That children have a right to their parents' fidelity has often been said; and that children are made unhappy by divorce is surely more than obvious. I would like to suggest a further perspective from which the matter of divorce can be considered.  
In a divorce situation one can no doubt set up a plea for the children's right to happiness, as against the right to happiness which the parents claim or (more probably) which one of the parents claims for himself or herself. To me it seems more positive to go directly to that parent's heart and to try to help him or her to weigh his or her own happiness and his or her children's happiness together, so as to see that they cannot be separated: that the happiness of the children (the easier happiness that the children are entitled to) and their parents' happiness (the tougher happiness that the parents should be prepared to live) are so interlinked that one cannot stand without the other.  
Suppose: A married person has fallen "out of" love with his or her spouse and "into" love with a third party. He or she thinks of divorce and would justify the possibility in the name of "my right to happiness". That such a person is thinking selfishly is less to our point than the fact that he or she is not thinking clearly. That person's right to happiness will not be satisfied by a divorce, because a divorce harms too many things that are essential to his or her happiness. It shatters his or her children's happiness; and that fact effectively undermines the divorced parent's happiness too.

A heart divided about happiness  
The situation needs adequate analysis. It is not enough to see a sort of external opposition of "happinesses", as if the person were caught in a cross-fire between a personal right to happiness and one's children's right to happiness. Nor is it enough to say that husband or wife should be prepared to sacrifice their personal happiness to that of their children. There is truth in that; but it is only part of the truth. Such an analysis does not go deep enough.  
The real point is that his or her own heart is divided in itself precisely about personal happiness. That heart is torn between two conflicting considerations about happiness; and unless the tension is resolved properly, he or she will never be happy.  
On the one hand there is the thought, "I won't be happy if I have to continue living with my husband or wife (and - perhaps - "I won't he happy unless I can live with X, whom I now feel I love"). On the other hand, there is the thought, "But I won't be happy without my children's love either!"  
This last point has to be considered in its full implications. Because a person may argue: "But, I can divorce and still have my children with me - at least most or part of the time"; or, "I can divorce, and still love my children. I can divorce and still have my children's love".  
This is where reasoning loses touch with reality. A divorced person may retain partial or total custody of their children. What is not retained is the children's love, certainly not all of it. At the best, a divorced parent might retain a very reduced part of it, for the very fact of divorce inevitably destroys a large part of that love. That is why it is fooling oneself to think, "Even if I get a divorce, I'll still love my children, as before; and they'll still love me, as before". It is just not true; if you divorce, things can never be as before. They won't love you as before; they will love you, at best, with a maimed love, with the same sort of love that you showed them in divorcing. If your love for them is not prepared for sacrifice, their love for you will be without respect.  
When a marriage has remained childless, husband or wife has little defence against the temptation to see divorce as the easy way out of difficulties and the easy way into happiness. But once a married person has become a parent, there is no easy way out of difficulties and no easy way into happiness. Unless their children mean absolutely nothing to them, such parents have only one way to happiness: a way that goes through those difficulties.  
Only where there is no love for the children is divorce the easy way out. But then it is the way out for loveless persons who, having chosen that way, will carry their lack of love with them.  
Where there are children and where there is love for them, the temptation of divorce puts every quality and resource a person has to the test. Some people come out victorious from the struggle, some come out defeated. Many defeats, with their train of sadness, could be avoided if people were helped to think more clearly about the issues and the forces involved.  
The issue is happiness - for all concerned. And the forces - the forces at work right there within the heart of the person tempted to divorce - are basically two. One force - a powerful and, perhaps, seemingly irresistible force - thrusting against the marriage is a voice repeating insistently, I cannot stand my partner. I cannot keep it up any longer. At the same time and in the same heart, however, there is force thrusting in favor of the marriage, in favor of the home of which I am father or mother, in favor of my children, with another voice repeating with equal insistence, I cannot let my children down. I cannot destroy their love.  
Two forces fighting each other. Two voices struggling to be heard, each trying to shout the other down. One is the voice of tiredness: I've had enough. It is the voice of self-concern and self-pity: of surrender. The other is the voice of generosity and loyalty: You've got someone besides yourself to think of. Keep fighting. Two forces fighting inside. Which will win?  
The voice of tiredness has its arguments. "But - it is better for the children if we separate. That way they won't be exposed to these continuous quarrels between us which do them such harm". The fault with this argument is that it does not present all the alternatives. It is bad for children to be exposed to their parents' quarrels. It is better for them not to be so exposed. But it is worse for them to be exposed to their parents' divorce. One has reflected little on life if one has not realized that it is more damaging for a child to lose a parent through divorce than to lose him or her through death.

All the love my children need  
If a person thinking of divorce is capable of thinking clearly, he or she will realize: Divorce may be easier on me, but it can never be better for my children. What is good for children, what is best for them, is that their parents - the father and mother of the family they belong to (and no substitute father or mother) - live together, in deliberate and faithful union, if not in perfect harmony.  
"But that is impossible. In our case, it is impossible. The way he or she goes on. It drives me mad... No, no. We cannot live together, not even with a minimum of external harmony".  
You can't live together? It depends on how strong your motives are. If you are really concerned about your children and about what is best for them, then - with prayer, with God's help - you may yet learn to live together, at least with that minimum of external harmony. You cannot live together? You can try - for your children's sake.  
"No, No. I can't do it". (And the comes a further "argument"): "And in any case I do love my children. Even if divorced, I'll give them all the love I gave them before. I'll give them all they love they need"...  
Don't you see that the love they need is not just a father's love in isolation, or a mother's love in isolation? It is not just your love alone that they need; it is his love or her love as well. The love they need is their parents' love: both your loves together, your united love: father's and mother's love irrevocably put together and held sacred against every effort to pull them apart.  
"What God has joined together, let no man put asunder" (Mt 19:6). The divine prohibition applies to divorce in more ways than one. It is also, and very particularly, that united parental love for their children which man - the parents themselves - must not tear apart. You cannot be united in your love for one another? You can be united in your love for your children.  
The children need my spouse's love, as well as mine. This is what God wants you to reflect. This is what your own very heart wants you to face up to: our children need our love, they are entitled to it. If you still doubt that this is true, ask them - whether they prefer two loves apart, or two loves together: their parents' love.  
Nevertheless, some parents contemplating divorce not only do not realize the truth of this, they even think that what the children need can easily be supplied in a substitute form. "My children need a father's or a mother's love, as well as my love? Well, of course, they can have it. Jim [or Mary] - whom I mean to marry once I am free - will make such a wonderful new parent; a much better parent, in fact, than that insensitive and intolerable Joe [or Jane] whom I've been putting up with all these years" [67].  
Such parents do not realize that for their children this "replacement love" can never be so. Jim or Mary may be liked by the children; or they may not. They may become good friends to them; or they may not. What Jim or Mary can never be or become is their father or mother.  
The fact is that Joe or Jane, however insensitive or intolerable, is their father or mother: the one they have and the one they need: defects and all.  
"But" - I hear the reply - "you don't know Joe. His drunken bouts. The way he treats the children when he is in that state. How can that be good for the children?" It's not. But your divorce will be worse. Your faithfulness will do them far more good than his drunkenness can do them harm. And your unfaithfulness will do them far more harm.

The lessons parents teach their children  
Parents are meant not only to hug and kiss their children or buy them presents or feed them and pay their school fees. They are meant to teach them, to prepare them for life. And you can teach them marvelously by sticking with that intolerable husband or wife. You can teach them also through your failures. Because of course you will have some failures. Even with those failures - provided you start again each time - you are still helping your children, and helping them immensely. You, in those specific difficult circumstances, are doing a wonderful job as a father or mother. You are teaching them two most important lessons for life:  
- that certain things are sacred in life, and marriage is one of them; that marriage is for keeps, until death;  
- that marriage, which is meant to be a lasting union, is a union of two ordinary persons, with plenty of defects. Marriages don't last because two people are perfectly matched, or because they were ideally suited to one another in temperament, or because they never had a row, never experienced difficulty in getting on... No - marriages last because people set their minds to it, because they learn to get on.  
How important it is for a young person entering adult life, and especially when approaching marriage, to be able to say: "My parents' marriage lasted. They stuck together. And it is not as if they always found it easy; not as if they were ideally matched. No way! They had their defects (we children too knew them: Mom's nerves, Dad's binges...). And yet they stuck together - perhaps mainly for our sake. I think they stuck together too because they prayed. They had their quarrels, but they were faithful".  
How this steadies and strengthens young people who are themselves approaching marriage. They will not want to be less good than their parents; and they will know that this is not easy. And so they will think twice or three times about the marriage they are now contemplating. This boy, this girl... Will it last between us? And when the voice comes inside - Does it matter so much? If it does not work, you can always take the easy way out - they will be more likely to reply, as a human heart should: But I don't want the easy way out. My parents didn't want it; or at least they didn't take it. I want a marriage that works. I want a love that lasts. I can see plenty of people around me, and not too much older than myself, who have taken the easy way out. And what an unhappy and unholy mess they seem to be making of their lives. I don't want that.  
This is the big lesson about marriage that is taught to children by the fidelity - under strain - of their parents. What is it, however, that is taught to their children, what sort of image of marriage is communicated to them, by parents who give way to the divorce temptation? Marriage - they are in effect telling their children - is a consumer commodity, not only liable to breakdown, but simply not worth repairing if it does break down. It is not really repairable at all. You just dump it as soon as it begins to go wrong, and go off and get a new one.  
A husband or a wife? Well, that is something you acquire, as you might an automobile. You choose an attractive model, one that you find comfortable, easy to use, demanding a minimum of effort on your part; but one that you abandon once it gets old or a bit rattly, and starts being more trouble than it is worth. Basically it is worth very little. So you just look around for a "better" model and trade the old one in.  
And, what if there are children in the marriage? Well, hopefully they'll enjoy the whole new transaction (after all, why can't they see it can be fun to change parents?). And if they don't, they'll have to grin and bear it. I'm their parent? Sure; but, to be honest, they were never really very important in my eyes. Just accessories that came with that original purchase I made. So, well, after all, that's it, that is what they are: just accessories... The main thing is that I must be happy with my automobile. And if the old accessories don't fit or won't go with the new model, well then, regretfully and all, you know, I'll have to let them go. They don't mean all that to me.  
That is the idea of marriage that divorced parents teach their children. And when those children marry, and the moment comes (it will come; it always comes) when their marriage becomes difficult, how will those children react? What sort of persons will they turn out to be in that moment? In all predictable certainty, they will be like their parents: Why should I try to make a go of my marriage now that the going has become tough? Why should I sacrifice myself for my children? Children don't care for their parents (oh yes, you cared - once - very much for your parents; and then they let you down and made you bitter). Children don't respect their parents; at least I never respected mine (but you did - right up to their divorce).  
Divorce casts a spell of unhappiness on children. And as the experience of that unhappiness mounts, there comes a growing bitterness towards their unfaithful parents.  
So, in this divorce you are considering, it is not just your children's present happiness that is at stake; it is their future happiness too: the sort of life that you prepared them for, the sort of happiness - easy or difficult, true or false - that you, by your own life and example, taught them to seek. It is not just your marriage that is at stake; it is also their marriage in the future. Dump your marriage (and your family) now; and you are sinking your children's marriage tomorrow.  
People contemplating divorce need to reflect on these realities - of which they may be only hazily aware. The choice they are faced with is not one between "freedom with happiness" on the one hand, and "condemned to misery", on the other.  
What they are faced with is a choice between two approaches to happiness. The first is difficult: to remain stuck (that is, faithful) to their present marriage and family. The second seems easy: to be "freed".  
What they may or may not see is that the second choice is not a choice for happiness at all. It frees them from too many things. It "frees" them from the duty of loving someone they once promised to love, but who no longer seems lovable; but it also "frees" them from the right and privilege of being loved by those whose love they surely still want but no longer merit: their own children.  
That is why the second choice is not a choice for happiness; or, if one wishes, it is a choice for such a poor "happiness" that it can never really make a person happy. It is a "profit-and-loss" happiness: calculated indeed, but badly calculated, because what has to be assigned to the loss column is just too much. It will be a happiness headed for quick bankruptcy because it has been acquired at too high a personal cost.  
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This chapter and the preceding one have been written for couples who sense that their marriage is breaking up. The preceding chapter was designed to help them reflect on conjugal fidelity: on the many motives for renewing or reviving the love that once brought their marriage into existence. But pastoral experience has of course taught me that with many couples it may seem too late to invoke that argument. It may be little use to appeal to a love that once existed but that is now (so they feel) dead beyond recovery. Even in such cases, nevertheless, one can and should appeal to the love that is still there: to their love for their children. That has been the purpose of this chapter: to appeal to parental fidelity. The motive of the children is the big motive for faithfulness: to keep a marriage together, whatever the effort [68].  
If the spouses make up their minds not to desert their children, God will not desert them. If they are prepared to make the effort to get on together, or at least to tolerate one another, then the basis is laid for a possible - though gradual - resurrection of their love for one another.  
So often estranged parents, who determine to work together for their children, to bury their differences and keep them buried, little by little rediscover respect for one another, because each is aware that the other is making a sacrifice; and from respect can come a new birth of love. The love they thought dead and gone forever, revives.  
I am sacrificing myself for my children. So is he or she. We are doing what we can for our children. And so the sense of joint purpose, of reunited endeavor, emerges. And gradually, if they persevere, this awareness leads to renewed respect. Respect gives rise to renewed esteem. And esteem, to reborn love.  
In all of this I have not mentioned what is surely the toughest case of all: where one of the parents has made a definitive break, and has already divorced and remarried someone else. What is the abandoned party to do? Not to abandon the children; and a clear way of abandoning them is to think of remarriage. If one parent has torpedoed the family, let the other not finally sink it. The remaining parent will certainly have to find a lot of extra strength somewhere. God alone can give it; but he will readily do so. If that parent prays, he or she will find the grace to give to the children the example of faithfulness - faithfulness, precisely, to an unfaithful husband or wife - that can still help the children to keep the ideal of marriage (which also means the demanding reality of marriage) before them.

7. Something further on indissolubility

Skepticism about binding commitments?

So, why not divorce? We have tried to show that it makes for unhappiness for most people, rather than for happiness. But the ultimate reason for no divorce lies with God. He made marriage indissoluble. He wants married love and family love to be indissoluble, as is his love for us. "Marriage based on exclusive and definitive love becomes the icon of the relationship between God and his people and vice versa. God's way of loving becomes the measure of human love" (Benedict XVI: Deus Caritas Est, 11).  
God's faithful love; this has to be the standard of human love too. It is a truth that our Western world urgently needs to recover. There will be no real or lasting happiness in marriage unless it is prepared for and entered on as a challenging and joyful commitment to faithful love.  
Indeed we have come far from that approach. So many people today are deeply skeptical about a permanent husband-wife relationship. They are no longer convinced that it is worth making and can be stuck to. This loss of faith in marriage, with the fundamental pessimism it denotes about the possibilities of finding a happy and lasting love in life, is a major crisis for humanity into which more and more people are being drawn; and are paying the consequences.  
Catholics too, in ever larger numbers, are coming to think that marriage-open-to-divorce is better than marriage-bound-to-indissolubility. In theological terms, this could be seen as a temptation against faith, since indissolubility is a defined dogma (Denzinger, no. 1807). As such, it is no small temptation. Yet its possible occurrence should come as less of a surprise when we recall the reaction provoked by Jesus when he insisted that according to the original divine plan, the marriage bond is unbreakable: if things are so, his very Apostles felt, then it is better not to marry (Mt 19, 10). But of course they were wrong. Things are so; and it is still good - a great good - to marry.  
Current misgivings about the value of indissolubility have no less serious anthropological implications, reflected in the idea that faithfulness to a lasting commitment, however freely undertaken, is not reasonably to be expected; it is something beyond human nature and people are not capable of it. As this idea spreads, it creates a mindset hostile to any type of permanent commitment: the priesthood and religious life included, as well as marriage.  
The idea that "indissolubility is a bad thing" - for which there must be a way out - has effects on both people and pastors. Those contemplating marriage approach it less seriously; and when they do marry, strive less to keep their marriage going later on as it becomes subject to stress. For their part, pastors and counselors may tend to prepare couples less in pre-marriage instruction for the difficulties they are going to meet, and may not be sufficiently positive and supportive with couples who are going through the actual experience of difficulty. We have a real problem on our hands when the 'solution' being offered for difficult marital situations is not "try to make a go of it, pray, rely on grace", but more and more: "seek a way out, a 'good faith' solution, an annulment..." Things will continue to deteriorate unless we can achieve a re-evaluation of married indissolubility. This has to be a central point of pastoral reflection and responsibility, especially in the formation of priests and counselors.  
Christian and secular anthropologies  
The Second Vatican Council sought to offer a renewed vision of marriage, of marital love and commitment. How is it that this renewed vision seems to have been so infrequently translated into practice? One reason, I feel, is that much post-conciliar reflection on marriage has not always grasped the Christian anthropology which is a key to conciliar thinking about human realities, especially as applied to the marital covenant. The result is that much recent understanding and presentation of marriage has been largely, though no doubt unconsciously, colored by the anthropology dominant in our secular world.  
The "secular anthropology" I refer to is that individualistic view of man, which sees the key to human fulfillment in self: self-identification, self-esteem, self-concern, self-assertion... The current crisis about indissolubility - the tendency to look on it as an "anti-value" - finds much of its explanation in this individualism, present outside and inside the Church. Individualism fosters a fundamentally self-centered approach to marriage, turning it into a tentative agreement between two individuals, each inspired by self-interest, rather than seeing it as a shared endeavor where a couple want to build together a home for themselves as spouses and for their children.  
I doubt that one can come to see indissolubility in a positive light without understanding and assimilating Christian personalism, that alternative to individualism which we have seen as a key to the anthropological thinking of the Second Vatican Council and of Pope John Paul II. If the human person can attain fulfilment only through the sincere gift of self to worthwhile values [69], it should be clear that marriage, as a real gift and not just a loan of self, is the normal way of human fulfilment.

A choice between two fears?  
Yes, I would like to marry, but... Yes, I am ready to "tie the knot", - always provided I can untie it at will and drift away - where I will, or where I am carried. Unbound, unhindered, ungoverned, loose, drifting, homeless, family-less; on my own. People can clarify their approach to this matter and be helped in the decisions they make about it, if they realize that for each one it has to be a choice between two fears: fear of commitment and fear of isolation. Which am I more scared of - commitment or isolation?  
The Devil is the most isolated being in the whole universe. He cares for no one, loves no one, is bound to no one. He perhaps thinks he loves himself; in fact he hates himself - if he would only admit it. But to see the truth is not his 'forte', and to admit it is repugnant to his nature. In his pride he keeps up the pretence of self-sufficiency; yet in his heart - if he had one and could go to it - he knows his life is nothing more than the self-love of a self not worth loving.  
Now let us try to draw some practical conclusions from these points. We could first consider preparation for marriage; and then, care during marriage.

Pastoral preparation for marriage  
We have to try to ensure that education given to young people, at least in Catholic institutions, is inspired by a truly Christian anthropology, which restores the sense of the naturalness and attractiveness of the call to marriage, with special insistence on the goodness of the commitment to an unbreakable bond of love. Two aspects of this education could be distinguished.  
Love-education, which really means education in giving. If frustration is inevitable and fulfillment not possible without giving self, then each of us faces three main problems in life: (1) to find something - some ideal, some person - worth giving self to; (2) to be able to give self (for this, one must first possess self); (3) to able to stick to the gift (because fulfillment is not a momentary but a life-long process).  
Corresponding to these problems, perhaps three rules could be put to our young people. First, don't be afraid to give of yourself, now. Practice self-giving now, in your teens, at home, in service activities. Second, don't give yourself sexually until the moment comes; and that moment is marriage. As we have seen in chapter two, if you give yourself before, you give yourself in parts and too easily, and have little or nothing left to give when the moment comes (a powerful argument in favour of pre-marriage chastity). Third, when the moment does come for marriage (if that is your vocation), give yourself really, in the full gift of your conjugal self.  
Sex-education. Though some would deny it, the contemporary attitude not just toward marriage but toward sexuality is tinged with profound pessimism. When sex is presented as easily-accessible pleasure, it becomes almost impossible for people to understand its importance and its fragility in so many aspects of human development.  
Applying what was seen in chapter one, we could say that proper sex-education must help young people:  
- understand the truly human side of sexuality: not only the equal dignity of the sexes, but especially the value of sexual complementarity. Here we are up against a pervasive unisex culture and philosophy.  
- achieve proper sexual identification, seeing the development of masculinity and femininity as goals to be pursued. Many girls (just to take one example) seem today to have little idea of those traits of feminine nature which can captivate a man, and hold him captive, even as physical charms may wane.  
- understand the delicacy of the sexual relationship [70]. Sex used to be an area of happiness - a promise or a hope of happiness - surrounded with danger. Once the sense of danger has been taken away, the hope of happiness seems to be going with it too.  
In this work, our educators ought to be the first to realize that when sexuality is reduced to the level of physical differences, women are the losers; for on the merely physical level, man is the stronger and can easily dominate. Whereas, when the more truly human and spiritual aspects of sexuality are operative, woman tends to acquire a special ascendancy and superiority.  
Educators need equally to realize that an over-emphasis on independence with an under-emphasis on complementarity, can make the achievement of true sexual identity almost impossible. Many marriages fail today because there is not enough masculinity or femininity to keep them together. No preparation for marriage is adequate if it does not help toward spousal role identification.

Pastoral care during marriage  
***Toward a couple as spouses***. It is easy to make the marital commitment. It is not easy to maintain it, to perfect it, thus reaching, as Veritatis splendor says, "that maturity in self-giving to which human freedom is called" (17). People need to be reminded that, together with prayer and the sacraments, a main key to success in conjugal love (the love that binds together two persons with defects) is learning to forgive and asking for forgiveness. Each time husband and wife acknowledges their defects to the other, they become more human and therefore more lovable. The husband and wife who deny their defects or seek to justify them, become more proud, more isolated; less loving and less lovable.  
Not only the spouses themselves, but their relatives and friends need to be taught to understand and respect the demanding beauty of the conjugal relationship, in the life-long task of learning to love. People need support: from relations and friends first; and then from pastors and counsellors. There is need for a constant catechesis which shows a new appreciation of the commitment involved in marriage, especially of the goodness of the bond; so that the very beginnings of trouble are met with positive help and advice, not with encouragement to seek an annulment (which may not be granted in the end). Friends and neighbors all need to be reminded of their grave responsibility to be a help and not a hindrance to the perseverance of married persons.  
***Toward a couple as parents***. Wise spouses learn how to distribute parental roles. As in any team, complementing one another lessens difficulties in getting along. But if the team approach is lost, if they let themselves be pushed into a power-struggle, the family enterprise is almost bound to end in failure.  
The help that families need cannot come mainly from outside, nor will it suffice if provided on a merely collective or social level, such as family days or activities organized by the parish. It is in the home itself that families need to develop their personality and strength. The family life of each Christian home needs to take on a forceful quality, expressed in family conversations, plans, projects, which are humanly attractive [71]. No easy task, given the attraction of other forces? Agreed; but there is the challenge to parents to be the creators of something unique. They need to find encouragement from their pastors in this, just as they certainly will find the grace of God.

In Summary  
The true commitment and binding relationship of marriage attracts powerfully, for there is something deeply natural to it. However, for our nature in its present state, there is also something deeply difficult in it. To achieve the fulfilment promised by marriage is not possible without grace; it is possible with grace (Veritatis splendor, nos. 102ff).  
Our pastoral presentation of marriage must be optimistic - showing the natural attraction, without underplaying the natural difficulties; and emphasizing the supernatural help.  
True pastoral care for marriage must therefore be based on:  
- sound anthropology, which on the one hand stresses the complementarity of the sexes and of sexual roles no less than the equal dignity between man and woman; and which then particularly underlines the main aspects that make marriage attractive and worthwhile, especially offspring and indissolubility;  
- sound psychology, which helps people realize that difficulties, even severe ones, must arise in marriage; and that it is there that love, which means giving, is tested and grows or fails;  
- sound pastoral and sacramental theology, which equips married people to face difficulties with full reliance on sacramental grace, and on prayer and guidance [72];  
- sound ascetical theology, which reminds those preparing for marriage and those in marriage of what Vatican II so emphasized: that marriage is fundamentally and ultimately a vocation to holiness (Lumen gentium, nos. 39-41; Gaudium et spes, nos. 48-49); it means constant exercise in true love, which consists in self-giving, self-sacrifice, losing self for others and so finding oneself.  
In the end we cannot and should not want to get away from the fact that happiness - also the happiness that marriage promises - is not possible without generosity and sacrifice. I often heard St. Josemaría Escrivá, the founder of Opus Dei, say that happiness has its roots in the shape of a Cross [73]. It is the rule and apparent paradox of the Gospel: only by "losing" and giving ourselves - the essence of love - can we begin to find ourselves and, even more than ourselves, the happiness we are made for.  
Our preaching on marriage will produce no renewal if it does not reflect this basic truth. As the 1994 Catechism of the Catholic Church says: "Following Christ, denying themselves, taking on themselves their own cross, the spouses can "understand" the original sense of matrimony and live it with the help of Christ. This grace of christian matrimony is a fruit of the Cross of Christ, the source of all christian life" (no. 1615).

8. Married Love and Contraception  
We have considered indissolubility as God's plan for binding the spouses to the main business of life, that of learning to love. We have also studied divorce as the self-deceptive and self-defeating attempt to find happiness on one own's conditions and not on God's. Fear of self-giving commitment and lack of confidence in God lie behind all of this. But this fainthearted distrust in God's plans characterizes another modern approach to marriage which also powerfully undermines its capacity for giving happiness. This is the current contraceptive mentality which holds that the procreative orientation or potential of spousal sexual union can be artificially and deliberately nullified, without thereby denaturalizing the conjugal act or in any way marring its capacity to effect conjugal union and give unique expression to marital love.  
The Catholic Church has always regarded contraception as intrinsically immoral and a grave sin against marital chastity [74]. The purpose of this chapter is to show why contraception does in fact denaturalize the conjugal act, to the extent that, far from uniting the spouses and expressing and confirming the love between them in a unique way, it tends to undermine their love by radically contradicting the full mutual self-giving that this most intimate act of the marital relationship should signify. The practice of contraception is by its very nature a major impediment to growth in married love and married happiness.  
Some forty years ago contraceptives were debated in terms of marital ethics. Their advocates insisted on the right of each married couple to live their sexual life as they choose, without any pressure from outside (except from those who harped on the population bomb). The context has significantly changed today. The use of contraceptives is no longer presented as a personal right of married people but, we are told, as almost a universal social duty for everyone. For if marriage is on the wane, sex is on the increase. The sexual revolution of the 1960s has been totally successful. We have achieved sexual liberation on a universal scale: "sex for everyone". Sex, of any type and with anyone, has indeed become a main commodity of our consumer society - so absorbing and yet so handily casual without any ties attached.  
Nevertheless, not everything is perfect in this new Garden of Eden. Unfortunately it turns out that sex is not quite "safe"; it is accompanied by dangers (pregnancy, disease). So, our liberated culture has to become a "safe-sex culture"; and in this context contraceptives are presented as more required than ever. They are necessary and must therefore be supplied; and so the marketers arrive; but now with a new agenda. When dangers accompany a popular consumer commodity, market measures must be taken to reduce the dangers and make the commodity safe... In fact, as long as sexual activity is "safe" (even if devalued), why not encourage it for everyone? The contraceptive market has great interest in doing so.  
We could reflect much more along these lines which suggest the hollowness to which the relations between the sexes have been reduced. But we will not do so since we want to keep to issues directly affecting married life. Our purpose in this chapter then is simply to show that contraceptive marital sex is not only non-procreative (something obvious), but also non-unitive as between the spouses, and moreover that it is non-sexual, within any human understanding of sexuality.

The argument for conjugal contraception  
The argument for conjugal contraception could be summarized as follows. The marriage act has two functions: a biological or procreative function, and a spiritual-unitive function. However, while it is only potentially a procreative act, it is actually and in itself a love act: it truly expresses conjugal love and unites husband and wife. Now, while contraception frustrates the biological or procreative potential of the marital act, it fully respects its spiritual and unitive function; in fact it facilitates it by removing tensions or fears capable of impairing the expression of love in married intercourse. In other words - this position claims - while contraception nullifies the procreative aspect of marital intercourse, it leaves its unitive aspect intact.  
Until quite recently, the argument presented by christian moralists against artificial birth-control has mainly been that the sexual act is naturally designed for procreation, and it is wrong to frustrate this design because it is wrong to interfere with man's natural functions. Many persons are not quite convinced by this argument, which does seem open to rather elementary objections. After all, we do interfere with other natural functions, for instance when we use ear-plugs or hold our nose, etc., and no one has ever argued that to do so is morally wrong. Why then should it be wrong to interfere for good reasons with the procreational aspect of marital intercourse? The defenders of contraception, in any case, dismiss this traditional argument as mere "biologism"; as an understanding of the marital act that fails to go beyond its biological function or possible biological consequences, and ignores its spiritual function, namely, its function in signifying and effecting the union of the spouses.  
Those who have advanced this defence of marital contraception - couched in apparently personalist terms - feel they are on strong and positive ground. An effective answer that shows the radical defectiveness of this position demands that we too develop a personalist argument, based on a true understanding of sex and marriage.  
The contraceptive argument is evidently built on an essential thesis: that the procreative and the unitive aspects of the marital act are separable, that is, that the procreative aspect can be nullified without in any way vitiating the conjugal act or making it less a unique expression of marital love and union.  
This thesis is of course explicitly rejected by the Church. The main reason why contraception is unacceptable to a christian conscience is, as Pope Paul VI put it in Humanae vitae, the "inseparable connection, established by God... between the unitive significance and the procreative significance which are both inherent to the marriage act" (HV 12).  
Paul VI affirmed this inseparable connection. He did not however go on to explain why these two aspects of the marital act are in fact so inseparably connected, or why this connection is such that it is the very ground of the moral evaluation of the act. Perhaps calm reflection, matured by the ongoing debate of forty years, can enable us to discover the reasons why this is so: why the connection between the two aspects of the act is in fact such that the destruction of its procreative reference necessarily destroys its unitive and personalist significance. In other words, if one deliberately destroys the power of the conjugal act to give life, one necessarily destroys its power to signify love: the love and union proper to marriage.

The marital act as an act of union  
Why is the act of intercourse called the conjugal act, that is, the most distinctive expression of marital love and self-giving? Why is this act - which is but a passing and fleeting thing - particularly regarded as an act of union? After all, people in love express their love and desire to be united in many ways: sending letters, exchanging looks or presents, holding hands... What makes the sexual act unique? Why does this act unite the spouses in a way that no other act does? What is it that makes it not just a physical experience but a love experience?  
Is it the special pleasure attaching to it? Is the unitive meaning of the conjugal act contained just in the sensation, however intense, that it can produce? If intercourse unites two people simply because it gives special pleasure, then it would seem that one or other of the spouses could at times find a more meaningful union outside marriage than within it. It would follow too that sex without pleasure becomes meaningless, and that sex with pleasure, even homosexual sex, becomes meaningful.  
No. The conjugal act may or may not be accompanied by pleasure; but the meaning of the act does not consist in its pleasure. The pleasure provided by marital intercourse may be intense, but it is transient. The significance of marital intercourse is also intense, and it is not transient; it lasts.  
Why should the marital act be more significant than any other expression of affection between the spouses? Why should it be a more intense expression of love and union? Surely because of what happens in that marital encounter, which is not just a touch, not a mere sensation, however intense, but a communication, an offer and acceptance, an exchange of something that uniquely represents the gift of oneself and the union of two selves.  
Here, of course, it should not be forgotten that while two persons in love want to give themselves to one another, to be united to one another, this desire of theirs remains, humanly speaking [75], on a purely volitional level. They can bind themselves to one another, but they cannot actually give themselves. The greatest expression of a person's desire to give himself is to give the seed of himself [76]. Giving one's seed is much more significant, and in particular is much more real, than giving one's heart. "I am yours, I give you my heart; here, take it", is mere poetry, to which no physical gesture can give full expression. But, "I am yours; I give you my seed; here, take it", is not poetry, it is love. It is conjugal love embodied in a unique and privileged physical action whereby intimacy is expressed - "I give you what I give no one else" - and union is achieved: "Take what I have to give. This will be a new me. United to you, to what you have to give - to your seed - this will be a new you-and-me, fruit of our mutual knowledge and love". In human terms, this is the closest one can come to giving one's self conjugally and to accepting the conjugal self-gift of another, and so achieving spousal union.  
Therefore, what makes marital intercourse express a unique relationship and union is not the sharing of a sensation but the sharing of a power: of an extraordinary life-related, creative, physical, sexual power. In a truly conjugal relationship, each spouse says to the other: "I accept you as somebody like no one else in my life. You will be unique to me and I to you. You and you alone will be my husband; you alone will be my wife. And the proof of your uniqueness to me is the fact that with you - and with you alone - am I prepared to share this God-given, life-oriented power".  
In this consists the singular quality of intercourse. Other physical expressions of affection do not go beyond the level of a mere gesture; they remain a symbol of the union desired. But the conjugal act is not a mere symbol. In true marital intercourse, something real has been exchanged, with a full gift and acceptance of conjugal masculinity and femininity. And there remains, as witness to their conjugal relationship and the intimacy of their conjugal union, the husband's seed in the wife's body [77].  
Now if one deliberately nullifies the life-orientation of the conjugal act, one destroys its essential power to signify union. Contraception in fact turns the marital act into self-deception or into a lie: "I love you so much that with you, and with you alone, I am ready to share this most unique power..." But - what unique power? In contraceptive sex, no unique power is being shared, except a power to produce pleasure. But then the uniqueness of the marital act is reduced to pleasure. Its significance is gone.  
Contraceptive intercourse is an exercise in meaninglessness. It could perhaps be compared to going through the actions of singing without letting any sound of music pass one's lips.  
Love-duets used to be more popular on the movies than they are nowadays. Two lovers who, together and in opera-style, express their mutual love in song. How absurd if they were to sing silent duets: going through the motions of singing, but not allowing their vocal chords to produce an intelligible sound: just meaningless reverberations...; a hurry or a flurry of movement signifying nothing. Contraceptive intercourse is very much like that. Contraceptive spouses involve each other in bodily movements, but their "body language" is not truly human [78]. They refuse to let their bodies communicate sexually and intelligibly with one another. They go through the motions of a love-song; but there is no song.  
Contraception is in fact not just an action without meaning; it is an action that contradicts the essential meaning which true conjugal intercourse should have as signifying total and unconditional self-donation [79]. Instead of accepting each other totally, contraceptive spouses reject each other in part, because fertility is part of each one of them. They reject part of their mutual love - its power to be fruitful.  
A couple may say: we do not want our love to be fruitful. But if that is so, there is an inherent contradiction in their trying to express their love by means of an act which, of its nature, implies fruitful love; and there is even more of a contradiction if, when they engage in the act, they deliberately destroy the fertility-orientation from which precisely derives its capacity to express the uniqueness of their love.  
In true marital union, husband and wife are meant to experience the vibration of human vitality in its very source [80]. In the case of contraceptive "union", the spouses experience sensation, but it is drained of real vitality.  
The anti-life effect of contraception does not stop at the "No" which it addresses to the possible fruit of love. It tends to take the very life out of love itself. Within the hard logic of contraception, anti-life becomes anti-love. Its devitalizing effect devastates love, threatening it with early ageing and premature death.  
At this point it is good to anticipate the possible criticism that our argument so far is based on an incomplete disjunction, inasmuch as it seems to affirm that the conjugal act is either procreative or else merely hedonistic... Can contraceptive spouses not counter this with the sincere affirmation that, in their intercourse, they are not merely seeking pleasure; they are also experiencing and expressing love for one another?  
Let us clarify our position on this particular point. We are not affirming that contraceptive spouses may not love each other in their intercourse, nor - insofar as they are not prepared to have such intercourse with a third person - that it does not express a certain uniqueness in their relationship. Our thesis is that it does not express conjugal uniqueness. Love may somehow be present in their contraceptive relationship; but conjugal love is not expressed by it. Conjugal love may in fact soon find itself threatened by it. Contraceptive spouses are constantly haunted by the suspicion that the act in which they share could indeed be, for each one of them, a privileged giving of pleasure, but could also be a mere selfish taking of pleasure.  
It is logical that their love-making be troubled by a sense of falseness or hollowness, for they are attempting to found the uniqueness of the spousal relationship on an act of pleasure that tends ultimately to close each one of them sterilely in on himself or herself, and they are refusing to found that relationship on the truly unique conjugal dimension of loving co-creativity which is capable, in its vitality, of opening each of them out not merely to one another but to the whole of life and creation.

Sexual love and sexual knowledge  
The mutual and exclusive self-donation of the marriage act consists in its being the gift and acceptance of something unique. Now this something unique is not only the seed (this indeed could be "biologism"), but the fullness of the sexuality of each spouse.  
It was in the context of its not being good for man to be alone that God made him sexual. He created man in a duality - male and female - with the potential to become a trinity. The differences between the sexes speak therefore of a divine plan of complementarity, of self-completion and self-fulfillment, also through self-perpetuation.  
It is not good for man to be alone because man, on his own, cannot fulfil himself; he needs others. He especially needs another: a companion, a spouse. Union with a spouse, giving oneself to a spouse - sexual and marital union in self-donation - are a normal condition of human growth and fulfilment.  
Marriage, then, is a means of fulfilment through union. Husband and wife are united in mutual knowledge and love - a love which is not just spiritual but also bodily; and a knowledge underpinning their love which is likewise not mere speculative or intellectual knowledge but bodily knowledge as well. Their marital love is also meant to be based on carnal knowledge; this is fully human and fully logical. How significant it is that the Bible, in the original Hebrew, refers to marital intercourse in terms of man and woman "knowing" each other. Adam, Genesis says, knew Eve, his wife. What comment can we make on this equivalence the Bible draws between conjugal intercourse and mutual knowledge?  
What is the distinctive knowledge that husband and wife communicate to one another? It is the knowledge of each other's integral human condition as spouse. Each "discloses" a most intimate secret to the other: the secret of his or her personal sexuality. Each is revealed to the other truly as spouse and comes to know the other in the uniqueness of that spousal self-revelation and self-gift. Each one lets himself or herself be known by the other, and surrenders to the other, precisely as husband or wife.  
Nothing can undermine a marriage so much as the refusal to fully know and accept one's spouse or to let oneself be fully known by him or her. Marriage is constantly endangered by the possibility of one spouse holding something back from the other; keeping some knowledge to oneself that he or she does not want the other to possess [81]. This holding back can occur on all levels of interpersonal communication: physical as well as spiritual.  
In many modern marriages, there is something in the spouses, and between the spouses, that each does not want to know, does not want to face up to, wants to avoid: and this something is their sexuality. As a result, since they will not allow each other full mutual carnal knowledge, they do not truly know each other - sexually or humanly or spousally. This places their married love under a tremendous existential tension that can tear it apart.  
In true marital intercourse each spouse renounces protective self-possession, so as to fully possess and be fully possessed by the other. This fullness of true sexual gift and possession is achieved only in marital intercourse open to life. Only in procreative intercourse do the spouses exchange true "knowledge" of one another, truly speaking humanly and intelligibly to one another; truly revealing themselves to one another in their full human actuality and potential. Each offers, and each accepts, full spousal knowledge of the other.  
In the body language of intercourse, each spouse utters a word of love that is both a "self-expression" - an image of each one's self - as well as an expression of his or her longing for the other. These two words of love meet, and are fused in one. And, as this new unified word of love takes on flesh, God shapes it into a person - the child: the incarnation of the husband's and wife's sexual knowledge of one another and sexual love for one another.  
In contraception, the spouses will not let the word - which their sexuality longs to utter - take flesh. They will not even truly speak the word to each other. They remain humanly impotent in the face of love; sexually dumb and carnally speechless before one another.  
Sexual love is a love of the whole male or female person, body and spirit. Love is falsified if body and spirit do not say the same thing. This is what happens in contraception. The bodily act speaks of a presence of love or of a degree of love that is denied by the spirit. The body says, "I love you totally", whereas the spirit says, "I love you reservedly". The body says, "I seek you"; the spirit says, "I will not accept you, not all of you".  
Contraceptive intercourse falls below mere pantomime. It is disfigured body-language; it expresses a rejection of the other. By it, each says: "I do not want to know you as my husband or my wife; I am not prepared to recognize you as my spouse. I want something from you, but not your sexuality; and if I have something to give to you, something I will let you take, it is not my sexuality" [82].  
This reflection enables us to develop a point we touched on earlier. The negation that a contraceptive couple are involved in is not directed only toward children, or only toward life, or only toward the world. They address a negation directly toward one another. "I prefer a sterile you", is equivalent to saying, "I don't want all you offer me. I have calculated the measure of my love, and it is not big enough for that; it is not able to take all of you. I want a 'you' cut down to the size of my love..." The fact that both spouses may concur in accepting a cut-rate version of each other does not save their love or their lives - or their possibilities of happiness - from the effects of such radical human and sexual devaluation.  
Normal conjugal intercourse fully asserts masculinity and femininity. The man asserts himself as man and husband, and the woman equally asserts herself as woman and wife. In contraceptive intercourse, only a maimed sexuality is asserted. In the truest sense sexuality is not asserted at all. Contraception represents such a refusal to let oneself be known that it simply is not real carnal knowledge. A deep human truth underlies the theological and juridic principle that contraceptive sex does not consummate marriage.  
Contraceptive intercourse, then, is not real sexual intercourse at all. By it the spouses simply do not become "one flesh" (Gen 2: 24). That is why the disjunctives offered by this whole matter are insufficiently expressed by saying that if intercourse is contraceptive, then it is merely hedonistic. This may or may not be true. What is true - at a much deeper level - is that if intercourse is contraceptive, then it is not sexual. In contraception there is an "intercourse" of sensation, but no real sexual knowledge or sexual love, no true sexual revelation of self or sexual communication of self or sexual gift of self. The choice of contraception is in fact the rejection of sexuality. The warping of the sexual instinct from which modern society seems to suffer is not so much an excess of sex, as a lack of true human sexuality.  
True conjugal intercourse unites. Contraception separates, and the separation works right along the line. It not only separates sex from procreation, it also separates sex from love. It separates pleasure from meaning, and body from mind. Ultimately and surely, it separates wife from husband and husband from wife.  
Contraceptive couples who stop to reflect can sense that their marriage is troubled by some deep malaise. The alienations they are experiencing are a sign as well as a consequence of the grave violation of the moral order involved in contraception. Only a resolute effort to break with contraceptive practices can heal the sickness affecting their married life. This is why the teaching of Humanae vitae, as well as subsequent papal magisterium on the matter, far from being a blind adherence to an outdated posture, represent a totally clear-sighted defence of the innate dignity and true meaning of human and spousal sexuality.  
We repeat then that the Church's position is in no way merely 'biological', i.e. taking no account of the realities of the spirit. However, bearing in mind the literal meaning of biology (the branch of knowledge which deals with living organisms and vital processes), then one could counter-assert that the whole of the Church's position here is in the truest sense 'biological'. It is a defense of life and a defense of love at one and the same time; and of their vital processes. It keeps love alive in the sense both of giving life to love and of orienting love to life.

Why is it that only open-to-life sex fulfils?  
Our argument so far is that contraceptive marital sex does not achieve any true personalist end. It does not bring about self-fulfillment in marriage, but rather prevents and frustrates it. But - one may still ask - does it follow that open-to-life marital sex alone leads to the self-fulfillment of the spouses? I think it does; and the reason lies in the very nature of love. Love is creative. God's love (if we may put it this way) "drove" Him to create. Man's love, made in the image of God's, is also meant to create. If it deliberately does not do so, it frustrates itself. A couple truly in love want to do things together; if possible, they want to do something "original" together. As we saw in chapter four, nothing is more original to a couple in love than their child: the image and fruit of their love and their union. That is why "the marital thing" is to have children; and other things, as substitutes, do not satisfy conjugal love.  
Procreative intercourse fulfils also because only in such intercourse are the spouses open to all the possibilities of their mutual love: ready to be enriched and fulfilled not only by what it offers to them, but also by what it demands of them.  
Further, procreative intercourse fulfils because it expresses the human person's desire for self-perpetuation. It expresses it and does not contradict it, as contraception does. It is only on life-wishes, not on death-wishes, that love can thrive. When a normal married couple have a child, they pass their child joyfully to each other. If their child dies, there is no joy, there are tears, as they pass its dead body to one another. Spouses should weep over a contraceptive act: a barren, desolate act which rejects the life that is meant to keep love alive, and would kill the life their love naturally seeks to give origin to. There may be physical satisfaction, but there can be no joy in passing dead seed; or in passing living seed only to kill it.  
The vitality of sensation in sexual intercourse should correspond to a vitality of meaning (remembering - as we have said - that sensation is not meaning). The very explosiveness of sexual pleasure suggests the greatness of the creativity of sex. In each conjugal act, there should be something of the magnificence - of the scope and power - of Michelangelo's Creation in the Sistine Chapel in Rome... But it is the dynamism not just of a sensation, but of an event: of something that happens, of a communication of life.  
A lack of true sexual awareness characterizes the act if the intensity of pleasure does not serve to stir a fuller understanding of the greatness of the conjugal experience: I am committing myself - my creative life-giving power - not just to another person, but to the whole of creation: to history, to mankind, to the purposes and design of God. In each act of conjugal union, John Paul II teaches, "there is renewed, in a way, the mystery of creation in all its original depth and vital power" [83].  
A last point should be made. The whole question we are considering is of course tremendously complicated precisely by the strength of the sexual instinct. Nevertheless, the very strength of this instinct should itself be a pointer towards an adequate understanding of sexuality. Elementary commonsense says that the power of the sexual urge must correspond to deep human aspirations or needs. It has of course been traditional to explain the sexual urge in cosmic or demographic terms: just as we have a food appetite to maintain the life of the individual, so we have a sex appetite to maintain the life of the species. This explanation makes sense - as far as it goes. However, it clearly does not go far enough. The sex appetite - the strength of the sex appetite - surely corresponds not only to cosmic or collectivist needs, but also to personalist needs. If man and woman feel a deep longing for sexual union, it is also because they have - each one personally has - a deep longing for all that is involved in true sexuality: self-giving, self-complementarity, self-realization, self-perpetuation, in spousal union with another.  
The experience of such complete spousal sexuality is filled with many-faceted pleasure, in which the simple physical satisfaction of a mere sense instinct is accompanied and enriched by the personalist satisfaction of the much deeper and stronger longings involved in sex, and not marred and soured by their frustration. If continuous and growing sexual frustration is a main consequence of marital contraception, this is also because the contraceptive mentality deprives the very strength of the sexual urge of its real meaning and purpose, and then tries to find full sexual experience and satisfaction in what is basically little more than a physical release.

Further thoughts on same-sex marriage  
Our considerations in this chapter may shed further light on the question of whether one can validly speak about a same-sex 'marriage'.  
We have attempted an anthropological analysis of the conjugal act by means of which spouses uniquely express their mutual self-giving. We are dealing with one of the most profound realities of human life. Our arguments have been human, not theological [84], because we consider that clear human thinking, if it probes sincerely and deeply enough, can of itself (without any recourse to theology) show how contraceptive sexual intercourse is not marital intercourse at all, has no power to signify spousal union, but rather contradicts it.  
Contraceptive intercourse in heterosexual marriage 'denies the truth' of conjugal love through a radical falsification of the very act which should give the fullest bodily expression to that love. The reasoning we have followed underlines the human hollowness of the idea of a "homosexual marriage". Homosexual acts can appease physical desire; but they can never - even remotely - signify the self-giving of two persons. Nor can they effect their union; the two are simply not made "one flesh". Homosexual acts are an exercise in emptiness, satisfying individual passion but leaving the persons as separate as before; nothing in the act unites them.  
Only a dualistic culture that chooses to see no natural and intrinsic connection between body and soul could wish to dub a homosexual relationship as a marriage.

9. Children and values  
Over my years at the Roman Rota I had to study thousands of marriage cases. A common grounds of petition for a declaration of nullity is that marital consent was vitiated through the exclusion of one of the three traditional bona or "goods" of marriage: the bonum fidei (fidelity to one partner; the uniqueness of the marital union), the bonum sacramenti (permanence of the marriage bond; the indissolubility of the union), or the bonum prolis (offspring; the fruitfulness of the union).  
Given the aspect of obligation involved in each of these bona or values, it is logical and, I suppose, healthy enough that ecclesiastical judges center their attention on the question of whether or not this obligation has been truly accepted by the person marrying. I do not think it is so healthy, however, if other people begin thinking of these bona mainly or simply in terms of their obligatoriness. If their thinking were to go this way, they could easily come to conclude that - since an obligation is normally something burdensome and we all tend to avoid burdens - the exclusion of permanence or fidelity or offspring cannot really be thought of as strange or exceptional; one can even begin to find good reasons for maintaining that it is something to be expected...  
These are of course not merely theoretical considerations. I am afraid that to quite a number of Christians today - and even to some who have a special mission to form and guide others (pastors, teachers, counsellors...) - the idea of people excluding one or other of these bona when they marry, no longer tends to seem surprising; it even seems natural enough.

Exclusion of offspring is not natural  
Exclusion, however, is surprising, precisely because it is not natural. It is not natural because one does not logically reject the obligations or responsibilities that necessarily accompany the acquisition of a good thing. If the thing is good enough, the goodness more than compensates the responsibilities. The purchase of an automobile involves burdens and responsibilities; but most people regard a car as a good thing and think that, despite the burdens involved, they are enriched by the acquisition of one car, or of two or three cars, if they can afford them [85].  
Thank God for St. Augustine, who hit on the happy idea of describing the essential elements of marriage as bona: as "good things". Thank God for John Paul II, who, in Familiaris consortio, spoke of indissolubility in terms of something joyful that Christians should announce to the world. "It is necessary", he said, "to reconfirm the good news of the definitive nature of conjugal love" (20).  
Fidelity and offspring are good things. Indissolubility is good news! The Bishop of Hippo and the Roman Pontiff have made affirmations that spur us to think: to pursue a line of thought that can lead to discovery or rediscovery. To my mind, it is vital for the future of marriage and the family that we rediscover the something hidden here that is elementary, that should be all too obvious, but has become all too obscured: the simple fact that each of the bona matrimonialia is exactly that: a quid bonum, a good thing. Each is "a good" because each contributes powerfully not only to the good of society, but also to the bonum coniugum, to the "good of the spouses, to their development and maturing as persons who have grown in worth and character and generosity: who have learned to love. (And that, of course, is the ultimate good that each of us needs to acquire and develop here on earth: the ability to love).

It is natural to want an exclusive, permanent bond  
Only when people recover this way of thinking will they properly understand that since these bona are good things, they are desirable; and it is natural to desire them. It is natural, because it corresponds to the nature of human love. Man finds something deeply good in the idea of a love (1) of which he is the privileged and singular object, (2) which will be his for as long as life lasts, (3) and through which, by becoming a co-creator, he can perpetuate himself (and, as we shall see, more than himself). Precisely because of the goodness which he sees in these "goods", what is natural to man is not to fear or exclude them, but to seek and welcome them.  
It is natural then to want an exclusive, permanent and fruitful marital union. It is unnatural to exclude any of these three elements. We need to get our thinking back into proper perspective so that we are hit by - and can hit others with - the fact of the natural goodness of these "goods" of marriage.  
The good of fidelity or exclusiveness is clear: "You are unique to me". It is the first truly personalized affirmation of conjugal love; and echoes the words God addresses to each one of us in Isaiah: Meus es tu - "You are mine" (Is 43:1).  
The good of indissolubility should also be clear: the good of a stable home or haven: of knowing that this "belongingness" - shared with another - is for keeps. People want that, are made for that, expect that it will require sacrifices and sense that the sacrifices are worth it. "Sacrifice cannot be removed from family life, but must in fact be wholeheartedly accepted if the love between husband and wife is to be deepened and become a source of intimate joy" [86]. It is a strange head and heart that rejects the permanence of the marriage relationship.  
For my present purposes, however, I will not enlarge on these two aspects, but wish rather to limit attention to the bonum prolis: the "good" or value of offspring.

Depriving oneself of goodness  
The contraceptive mentality - probed into so painfully by the healing intent of Humanae vitae - is an ailment that could prove fatal to Western society. Debate or disagreement about the specific morality of family planning techniques is not the heart of the matter: in itself, in fact, it is just one aspect of the overall pathological picture. The real sickness here is that practically our whole Western civilization has come to look on family limitation as a good thing and fails to see that it is the privation of a good thing.  
I am not thinking here of those couples who, for health reasons, economic factors, and so on, really need the help of natural family planning (and have recourse to it with regret). I am thinking of those others - the very many others - who could afford to have a larger family, and freely choose not to, apparently without comprehending the goodness of what they are thus depriving themselves of. They prefer to have less of the bona matrimonialia, less in particular of the "good" of offspring, so as to have more of material goods. And the quality of their life - more and more materialized, less and less humanized - flows inevitably from their choice. Material goods cannot hold a marriage together; matrimonial goods, especially the "good" of offspring, can.  
There is indeed something profoundly good in that specific aspect of conjugal sexual union in which is to be found its true uniqueness: the sharing together not so much in what may or may not be a unique pleasure, as in what is a unique power: a power - the result of sexual complementarity - to bring about a new life. Man and woman have a deep desire for such a true conjugal sexual union; and that desire is thoroughly rooted in human nature.  
It seems particularly important today to underline, in all its fullness, the personalist thrust of this natural desire, which goes beyond any desire for either mere self-assertion or mere self-perpetuation.

Self-assertion? Self-perpetuation?  
Contraceptive sexual intercourse between spouses can be merely self-assertive: each one seeking himself or herself, and failing truly to find or know or give to the other. True marital sexual intercourse, open to life, is - of its very nature - love-assertive. It asserts mutual conjugal love and donation, precisely in the uniqueness and greatness of the shared sexual potential of the spouses.  
The desire for self-perpetuation is something natural which in itself already has a deep personalist value. (If modern man does not readily grasp or feel this value, it is a sign of the extent to which he is humanly de-vitalized, de-naturalized and de-personalized). Conjugality, however, takes the procreative sexual urge beyond the natural wish to perpetuate just oneself. In the context of conjugal love, this natural desire for self-perpetuation also acquires new scope and meaning. It is no longer a matter of two separate selves, each wishing - perhaps in a selfish way - for self-perpetuation. It is rather the case of two persons in love, who naturally want to perpetuate the love that draws them to one another, so that they can have the joy of seeing it take flesh in a new life, fruit of that mutual spiritual and carnal knowledge by which they express their spousal love (cf. Gen 4:1).  
Two persons in love want to do things together: to design or make or buy or furnish together something that will be peculiarly theirs, because it is the fruit of their united decision and action. Nothing is more proper to a couple than their child. The sculptor hews his vision of beauty into lasting stone. Only parents can create living works of art, with each child a unique monument to the creative love that inspires and unites them.  
A society, through the monuments it builds, evokes the memory of the great things of its past, in order to keep its values alive in the present and for the future. Spousal love needs such monuments. When romance is fading, when perhaps it has died and the spouses are tempted to think that love between them has died with it, then each child remains as a living testimony to the depth and uniqueness and totality of the conjugal gift of self which they made to each other in the past - when it was easy - , and as an urgent call to keep giving now, even when it is difficult.

Planned absences  
Working at the Roman Rota, one not infrequently comes across petitions of annulment of what clearly are perfectly genuine marriages of couples who married out of love, but whose marriages collapsed fundamentally because they deliberately delayed having children and thus deprived their married love of its natural support.  
If two people remain just looking ecstatically into each other's eyes, the defects that little by little they are going to discover there can eventually begin to appear intolerable. If they gradually learn to look out together at their children, they will still discover each other's defects, but they will have less time or reason to think them intolerable. They cannot, however, look out together at what is not there.  
A series of planned absences is turning the married life of many couples today into a hollowed-out reality, a vacuum that eventually collapses in on itself. A married couple can stare the love out of each other's eyes. If married love is to grow, it has to contemplate, and be contemplated by, other eyes - many pairs of eyes - born of that very love [87].  
Conjugal love, then, needs the support represented by children [88]. Children strengthen the goodness of the bond of marriage, so that it does not give way under the strains that follow on the inevitable wane or disappearance of effortless romantic love. The bond of marriage - which God wants no man to break - is then constituted not simply by the variables of personal love and sentiment between husband and wife, but more and more by their children, each child being one further strand giving strength to that bond.  
There is a passage in a homily of John Paul II in Washington, D.C. in 1979 that should be specially highlighted: "it is certainly less serious [for parents] to deny their children certain comforts or material advantages than to deprive them of the presence of brothers and sisters, who could help them to grow in humanity and to realize the beauty of life at all its ages and in all its variety" [89]. I would suggest to parents too easily inclined to family limitation, that they read the Pope's reminder in the light of the Vatican II teaching that "children are the supreme gift of marriage and contribute to the greatest extent to the good of the parents themselves" (Gaudium et spes, 50). It is therefore not only their present children, but also themselves, that such parents may be depriving of a singular "good", of a unique experience of human life, the fruit of love.

Educated choices  
One frequently comes across statements to the effect that "family planning or limitation is more readily accepted by people as they get better educated". Whether we realize it or not, to admit such statements unquestioningly is to concede a whole philosophy of life. A very particular type of education, thoroughly imbued with a very particular kind of values (or rather of anti-values), is necessary before people are brought to the point of easily accepting family limitation. Can such education be regarded as Christian education? Can it be regarded as true education at all? It is worth recalling the judgment that John Henry Newman, in the 1850s, passed on the education of his time. Modern man, he said, is instructed, but not educated. He is taught to do things, and to think enough so as to do them; but he is not taught to think more [90].  
This whole issue is one of values and choices: of goods and options. Few people can have all the goods of this world. But most people have a certain choice. I can choose good A or good B, though possibly not both. Then I have to choose between them. The wise and properly human choice takes the better good, and knows it is richer in choosing so: that is the educated choice. The less human or less wise choice opts for the inferior good; and probably does not know it is duping and impoverishing itself. There is a forceful passage in the Bible which is not altogether without relevance here: "I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse; therefore choose life, that you and your descendants may live" (Dt 30:19). There is no half-way choice between life and death. What, one may ask, is the real term of the choices the Western world is making?  
In Kenya, in the 1980s, an African who had learned that the Western fertility rate averaged about 1.2, remarked to me: "Western couples must be very poor if they can't afford to have more than two children..." He was not a qualified "expert" in the Western sense; yet his words may be worth pondering. They could be complemented with another bit of "non-expert" wisdom, this time from the West itself. Some time back in England, I knew a recently married couple, a normal couple who wanted children. One child was born; but then there was an unwanted delay of three or four years. At last the mother became expectant again. Their first-born too was filled with expectations. But - a miscarriage occurred. The father had to tell the child he was not going to have that little brother or sister he wanted. "Look; Mom's not going to have that baby after all"; and, bowing before God's inscrutable ways, he added, "it's better that way..." The child however didn't bow so easily: "But, Daddy, is there anything better than a baby?..." [91]. Computerized programs never anticipate the things that children come up with. The wisdom of children is part of the bonum prolis.

Sense of values  
The child in that episode had a true sense of values: which, according to Humanae vitae, is precisely the first thing a married couple need to possess if they are to approach family planning correctly (21). A true sense of values is not shown by the couple who fail to see that a child is the best acquisition they can make, and the one that enriches them most.  
Many married couples in the West no longer seem to realize the simple truth that children are the most personalized fruit of their own conjugal love; and are therefore the greatest gift they can make to one another, being at the same time God's gift to both of them.  
"But - if we have an extra child, our children and we ourselves will be less well-off..." You will hardly say that the extra child will be less well off, unless you wish to rank yourself among those who wonder whether life itself is a good thing, or whether non-existence may not after all be preferable to existence.  
"But our other children - those we have already - will be worse off..." Will they? Pope John Paul suggests that, in terms of truly human values, they will not.  
"But, we ourselves... we will be less well-off. We will have a tougher time..." You may have to work harder, that is true (many people work very hard today so as to have material "goods"), but will what you are working for make you less happy?  
In seminars, when this matter comes up, I have at time asked my students to consider a small matter of comparative analysis. It goes something like this:  
Children Cars TV/VCR Education Holidays  
of children abroad  
FAMILY A: 2 2 2/2 Good or best schools Yes  
FAMILY B: 5 1 1/0 Second-rate schools Never

After putting this on the board, my first question to the students is: Which family has the higher standard of living? They all answer: Family A, of course. So I repeat the question: Which family has the higher standard of living? There may be the slightest hesitation, but they repeat the same answer. So I repeat the same question again, and a third, and perhaps a fourth time. Perplexity sets in, hesitations grow, until in the end someone "concedes": "well, of course, if you start considering children as part of your standard of life..."  
"If you start"... It is indeed time that we started putting children on the assets side, and not on the liabilities. On both, you say? OK; on both: like your motor car. A car is an asset and a liability. It costs money and effort and attention to acquire and to maintain: just as a child does. Your choice should begin by considering which is worth more, because to choose the other is to lower one's own standard of living [92].  
"Which will give me more satisfaction?" is no doubt a utilitarian rather than an idealistic viewpoint. Yet, even if a person wishes to apply that view to our subject, he or she would do well to consider the money and time and effort that people nowadays put into golf or computers or creative gardening, working at them, reading all about them, in search of a satisfaction they do not always get.  
How come they do not think parenthood worth working at? How is it they do not study books (there are plenty available) on how to enjoy caring for one's children, on the satisfactions of being a parent? And how is it (our horizons broaden again) they do not sense the call of an utterly unique creativity, the adventure of being co-creators?  
Somewhere deep in their hearts, couples probably do sense the truth of the fact that a child is a good and a great gift. The trouble is that they have been conditioned not to trust that truth. They have to be helped to trust it; and it is clear (at least to my mind) that only couples who have chosen the "good" of offspring - in all the fullness with which God wished to bless their marriage - can teach them. Pope Paul VI took good care to mention such parents first, among those who live up to God's expectations for responsible parenthood and exercise it "by the deliberate and generous decision to raise a numerous family" (Humanae vitae, 10.).  
So many marriages today are suffering from self-privation, a voluntarily induced impoverishment, brought about by a refusal of the gift of life and a rejection of the fruitfulness of love. Our modern well-off Western society may go down in history as "the deprived society"; where people - entire peoples - ailed to death through letting a sense of true human values be gradually sucked out of their lives.

The loss of sexuality  
A final word on this concept of privation. At times a privation may be wise and necessary - for instance when health reasons demand that a person abstain from solid food. But it is none the less a privation. And, if it is not to end in death, it must be a temporary measure, so that the patient can get back to being nourished by a normal and healthy appetite. The western appetite for sex today is not normal; nor is it healthy; nor, as I suggested in the last chapter, is it really sexual.  
The proponents of contraception reject the Church teaching that the procreative and unitive aspects of conjugal sex are inseparable and maintain that it is perfectly legitimate to separate them. But that is not what contraception actually does. Its real effect is not to separate these two aspects (with the implication that, though it annuls the procreative, it respects the unitive), but to destroy both. Contraceptive sex is not procreative: that is clear to everyone. What is not so clear to people is that it is not unitive, in any conjugal sense. The ultimate analysis, however, tells us that it is not sex, in any real human sense, at all.  
What is being separated is not sex from some element extraneous to sex; or even from some element peculiarly connected by an unfortunate accident of biological design to sex. What is being separated is the action of sex - the apparent action of sex - from the meaning of sex. The reality of sex is being totally put aside; and people are being left with a mere pantomime of sex.  
What is being separated is the very "body" of sex from the "soul" of sex; and what is being left is the corpse of sex. What contraception gives people is apparent "body-sex" that is actually soul-less sex. It is mummified sexuality: dead sex. Our modern world is busy in the process of killing human sex and sexuality.  
Many modern marriages are lacking a true sexual appetite. The sexuality marking them is not a truly human sexuality. A maimed masculinity and a maimed femininity are meeting in no authentic conjugal encounter. Such marriages, denied the essential humanizing and personalizing qualities of true conjugal sex - denied the true bonum sexualitatis: the true "good" of sexuality - are in danger of death by conjugal-sexual starvation. A self-imposed barrenness is denying their love the fruit which love itself is designed to produce, and which it needs for its own nourishment and survival.

10. Family Planning  
Family Planning and Married Fulfillment  
Little more than forty years ago, large families were a frequent and typically Catholic phenomenon. Today, in the developed world, they tend to be a rarity, also among Catholics. The swing to the small sized family began in the sixties and has intensified ever since. Three main explanations would seem to stand out: the demographic scare, or the "population bomb"; the "I-generation", with its emphasis on self-fulfillment, especially through success in professional work; the consumer mentality, as shown in a preference for material values.  
The defusing of the population bomb, at least in advanced countries, is scarcely being given the comment it deserves. Around the time of Vatican II, family planning was often presented in terms of urgent social responsibility. Population growth was seen everywhere as a threat to prosperity or even survival. Whatever the situation in the Third World, the force of the demographic argument has not only been lost in Western countries, it has been totally reversed. Dwindling and aging populations are now the prospect facing almost all the developed countries, which show strong evidence of being technologically developed societies in rapid human decline.  
Forty years of emphasis on self-fulfillment or on material comfort has been accompanied by an equal emphasis on family limitation. Children (one or two per family, at the most) have come to be regarded as "optional extras" for the life of a couple, not as the natural fulfillment of their married aspirations. Job, status, social life, gadgets, vacations, ease and comfort, are commonly seen as offering more happiness and self-fulfillment than do children. If one is to judge from the growing number of broken homes, fewer children per family has not led to greater married stability, fulfillment, or happiness. Nevertheless, Catholic couples too have been deeply affected by the family planning mentality, to the extent that a "planned" family is now often presented as a norm in pre-marriage instruction. The consequence is that most, if not all, of our young people marrying today regard family planning as a normal part of marriage and many, for whom it was never designed, are experiencing its effects on their married life.  
All of this implies a radical change in outlook that has taken place in little more than a generation. It is a relatively short period of time and yet, I think, long enough to warrant the drawing of some conclusions.

Married love and children  
It is worth recalling that Church teaching on family planning hinges on two essential principles or requirements: it must be carried out through natural methods, and there must be serious reasons to justify it.  
This second requirement, that family planning must respond to serious reasons (confirmed by Humanae vitae, nos. 10 and 16), appears once again in the Catechism of the Catholic Church: "For just reasons, spouses may wish to space the births of their children. It is their duty to make certain that their desire is not motivated by selfishness but is in conformity with the generosity appropriate to responsible parenthood" (no. 2368). Nevertheless, it has been questioned or ignored in recent years as if it represented a dated norm derived from an institutional view of marriage that takes no account of modern personalist insights and the legitimate aspirations of married love. A very different conclusion emerges from a due consideration of the Vatican II teaching that "children are the supreme gift of marriage and greatly contribute to the good of the parents themselves" (Gaudium et spes, 50; emphasis added).  
What Vatican II is saying is that married love finds strength in the natural support represented by children. Without that support, it can collapse. Married love, then, remains frustrated in what should be the normal pattern of its growth, if it does not issue in this natural fruit (we repeat that couples to whom God does not send children remain a case apart not considered here). The Catechism, having said that "married love tends naturally to be fruitful", adds: "A child is not something external added to the mutual love of husband and wife, but stems from the very heart of their reciprocal self-gift, of which it is the fruit and fulfilment" (no. 2366). Material possessions, or an easy life together, do not fulfil the aspirations of married love (love is ready for sacrifice and grows through it), nor are they a condition for its maintenance and growth. Children normally are such a condition.

Sacrifice and married love  
The Second Vatican Council dwells on how the generosity and courage that parents with a large family need to practice, lead them to perfection in Christ. "Whenever Christian spouses in a spirit of sacrifice and trust in divine providence carry out their mission of procreating with generous human and Christian responsibility, they glorify the Creator and perfect themselves in Christ. Among the married couples who thus fulfil their God-given mission, special mention should be made of those who after prudent reflection and common decision courageously undertake the proper upbringing of a large family" (Gaudium et spes, 50). These qualities are powerfully developed in spouses by their shared efforts to bring up such a family, and this creates an ongoing situation which favors a deepening of the regard and admiration they have for one another. Nothing in fact unites so much as sacrifice generously shared. We recall again those words of John Paul II in Familiaris consortio: "Sacrifice cannot be removed from family life, but must in fact be wholeheartedly accepted if the love between husband and wife is to be deepened and become a source of intimate joy".  
Spouses need to improve in life - to rise above their present worth - if they are to retain their partner's love. It is good therefore - it is essential - that each spouse sacrifices himself or herself for the other. However, as we said earlier, it is doubtful if any husband or wife, on their own, can inspire their partner indefinitely to generosity and self-sacrifice. It is for the sake of his or her children that a person most easily rises above self. In this way, in sacrifice lived also for their children, each parent improves and really becomes - in his or her partner's eyes also - a finer and more loveable person.  
That is why family limitation is not very properly described as a right, and is wrongly thought of as a privilege. It is basically a privation. It is meant for exceptional cases, for those couples who are obliged by serious reasons - by some powerful and over-riding factor - to deprive themselves of the fulfilling joy and the enriching value of children. A couple who, in the absence of such an over-riding factor, choose not to have more children, are starving their conjugal love of its natural fruit and stunting its growth. They are lessening their mutual preparedness for sacrifice, and in that way undermining the mutual esteem that can bind them together.  
Open-to-life sexual relations are the normal expression of married affection, and alone fulfil the conjugal instinct. To encourage people, without serious reason, to abstain from such relations is to place an unnecessary and unjustified strain on the solidity of their married life. The conjugal instinct, which draws people to marry, is not a mere sexual instinct, nor is it satisfied just through the companionship and love of a spouse. It looks to the fruit of that love. In other words, people are naturally drawn to marriage by a deep desire for fatherhood or motherhood. It is not at all difficult, in pre-marriage instruction, to help couples understand that having children is not opposed to self-realization but is rather one of the most basic natural expressions of the human desire to fulfil oneself. Are we not in danger today of downgrading the privilege and the personalist dimension of parenthood? It seems to me that the way family planning has at times been presented to our Catholic people in recent decades has not always reflected the true married personalism of Vatican II. Many programs for family planning have taken almost no account of the "serious reasons" needed to justify it, and (at a deeper level) have seemed oblivious of the aspect of privation that it involves. Rather than being presented as an extraordinary recourse for couples in special difficulties, family planning has been presented as a norm and even - one gets the impression - as a formula for happiness and as some sort of ideal for Catholic married life. This approach results in the impoverishment of the true Christian vision of marriage and of the fulfillment that marriage promises.  
It can be both unwise and unjust to push family planning in cases where it is not called for, or where there is in fact downright resistance to it. A few years ago, a married woman came to see me to get information about how to plan her family. She was about thirty-five, and had four children. I told her I could refer her to a reliable Catholic doctor but, noticing that she was healthy-looking, I asked if there was any special medical problem. "No", she answered, "but all my friends say that with four children I have enough". Then, seeing that she was fairly well dressed, I asked about the family financial situation. There was no special problem there either. Then, why are you so keen on family planning?, I asked. "Well," she said, "it's not so much me; it's my friends..." But do you want to have more children? She brightened up: "Oh, yes, I do. But you see... my friends..." Forget about your friends, I told her, and go ahead and have more children if that is what you want. She went off relieved and happy to be told there was nothing wrong in having more children: in following her natural instinct for motherhood, which is also an instinct of generosity.  
I am obviously not questioning the value of natural family planning or the importance of providing proper instruction about it to those whose marriage situation is such that they really need it. But I do suggest that any campaign to present it indiscriminately as a normal thing for couples can only have the effect of stunting the natural growth of marital love and of setting up obstacles to generosity, to the basis for mutual esteem, and to married happiness.

A dualistic view  
The crisis affecting married life has coincided with the dualistic view that would see the unitive and procreative aspects of marriage as accidentally connected, in such a way that the procreative aspect of intercourse can (through contraception) be "separated" - or rather eliminated - from the conjugal act, without in any way undermining the power of intercourse to express married union in a totally unique way.  
Humanae vitae, in reaffirming the age-old Catholic rejection of contraception, explicitly rejected this position, teaching the "inseparable connection, established by God... between the unitive significance and the procreative significance which are both inherent to the marriage act" (12). We have seen how the reflections of the intervening years, and in particular the personalist philosophy of marriage presented by Pope John Paul II, have led to a deeper understanding of this teaching of Humanae vitae in all its positive value. We need to guard against falling into a similar dualism with regard to the ends of marriage as presented by the revised Code of Canon Law, which says that matrimony is "by its nature ordered toward the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring" (can. 1055).  
The "good of the spouses" in any Christian view is not mainly the material well-being of the couple; it is, as we have seen, essentially their growth in Christ. Let us just recall those passages of Vatican II about how "Christian spouses help one another to attain holiness in their married life and in the accepting and rearing of their children" (Lumen gentium, 11); and about how children are "the supreme gift" of marriage and "greatly contribute to the good of their parents" (Gaudium et spes, 50). Children enrich their parents' lives in many human ways, and not least in virtue of the generous dedication they tend to evoke in them.  
It seems to me that our catechesis on marriage of these last decades has not always followed the true personalism of Vatican II. Instead, we have let our Christian couples absorb the prevailing secular outlook which holds that one or two children may be a possible adjunct or aid to married happiness, but that three children is already a dangerous number, and more than three is almost certainly bound to make for unhappiness.  
This view, which ultimately supposes an opposition between offspring and the good of the spouses, tends in fact to undermine the natural unity between the different aspects of marriage. A radically false disjunction is contained in the alternatives it offers: seeing marriage as either procreative or personalist, as if the prospects were: either more children, more burden, and therefore less love, less fulfillment, less happiness; or else, fewer children, less burden, and therefore stronger love and a more enduring happiness.  
The disjunction is doubly flawed. On the one hand, it presents happiness as a goal that can be achieved without sacrifice. On the other, it curbs or frustrates the natural longing for children present in the conjugal (and not the mere sexual) instinct, which makes true conjugality such a powerful force for genuine self-realization.

A truly human and Christian scale of values  
This false disjunction can only be overcome by analyzing the "good of the spouses" not in mainly material or economic terms, but according to a more truly human, as well as Christian, scale of values. As we have seen, marriage tends to the good of the spouses because it draws them out of themselves: toward each other and toward their children. The effort and sacrifice involved in this self-giving is both the proof of love and the condition for its growth. We have Christ's words for it that along this way of generosity lies fulfillment and happiness. "It is happier to give than to receive"; "Whoever loses his life will find it".  
In each child the spouses - co-creators with God - give to one another the most unique gift of love: flesh of their united flesh. Nothing can so cement a marriage. Individual self-centeredness tends to pull spouses apart; children hold them together. Each child is a bond of union created by the parents' love for one another, and subsisting even when the initial romantic attraction between them seems to have faded for ever. So often the children are the factor that keeps parents united, despite the tugs and pulls of softness or selfishness. It is lack of children - or, more concretely, the refusal of children - that can pull spouses apart. "We don't want another child", is the same as saying, "we don't want another bond of union. We have two already". Two may be too few to keep a couple united.  
Natural family planning has been a great boon for those many couples who really need it. To let it become a norm or an "ideal" for those who do not need it, is to foster marriages unnecessarily deprived of that "supreme gift" of children which, according to Vatican II, most contributes to the good of the spouses, enriches their lives and strengthens their conjugal love.  
Now I pass on to consider another point: how natural family planning - when practiced without sufficient need - can undermine the quality of family life, as well as of married life, and thus possibly contribute to another phenomenon that has become noticeable and serious in recent years: the decline in vocations.

Family Planning and The Crisis Of Vocations  
The decline in vocations to the priesthood and religious life has become one of the most critical problems facing the Church. The number of workers - in a vastly expanded harvest - has drastically shrunk, at least in developed countries in many of which the number of yearly ordinations is a fraction of what it was a generation ago.  
A variety of factors is advanced in explanation of the problem. Some refer to the "identity crisis" among priests and religious. A generation ago, this argument goes, vocations could almost always be traced back to a strong teenage admiration for some priest or nun whose dedicated lives were obviously happy and purposeful. Insofar as a number of priests and religious today fail to reflect a comparable sense of purpose or happiness, it is logical that fewer young people feel attracted to dedicate their own lives. Others point to the growth of materialism and the consumer mentality, or to the general decline of piety among the faithful. Whatever the truth in all of this, I think the root explanation is related to the family background from which vocations tend to come.  
It is above all from their parents and from the family atmosphere created by them that young persons acquire their deeper values. It is in the family that the basic dispositions making for a vocation are developed: faith, personal piety, trust in God, concern for others, loyalty, generosity, a readiness for sacrifice. Vatican II insists: "Inspired by the example and family prayer of their parents, children will more easily set out upon the path of a truly human training, of salvation, and of holiness" [93].  
It is obvious that there have been many changes in home life over the past forty years or so. A major one is the decline in family unity; such unity is normally a first requisite for the emergence of a vocation. Homes broken through divorce and annulment have enormously increased in this period, and a vocation from a broken home is always an exception. Bishops and Superiors are slow to accept candidates from such a background, also because experience has taught that the matter of perseverance becomes particularly difficult in their cases.  
The decline in the number of united homes, however, does not sufficiently explain the vocations crisis. After all, even if one reduces the number of relatively stable families to a third or a quarter of what it was a generation ago, this is still a sizeable number. How is it we are not getting that proportion of vocations?  
What is it that has changed within these stable families? Partly, I think, a decline in the spirit of other-centered sacrifice, but mainly the lessening of trust in God, which tends to result from family planning practiced without serious reasons. It is the place given to God in family outlook and affairs that has most changed.  
Parents today work as hard as parents did some fifty years ago, some even harder. Yet their children often get little impression of generosity and concern for others in all that effort and sacrifice; it is too self-motivated. A spirit of sacrifice that is not truly centered on others is not likely to inspire generous attitudes. Self-forgetfulness in the service of something more important than self - "losing" one's life for the sake of the Gospel - is a necessary disposition if a vocation is to be followed and flourish. The boy or girl who does not learn that generosity at home is not likely to learn it effectively elsewhere. The setting for acquiring christian values is created only when children sense that they are more important in their parents' eyes than income, relaxation, social life, career or promotion.  
What I would particularly like to put forward for consideration is the possible connection between the vocations crisis and the virtual disappearance in western countries of the large family.  
Hopefully we have gotten over the rather thoughtless attitude of dismissing large families as "biological accidents". A generation ago, the parents of such families well understood the different forms of contraceptive methods available at the time, and also the existence of what was then commonly referred to as the rhythm method. If they did not have recourse to either, this represented no biological accident but rather the conscious choice to have a larger family: the choice that Paul VI, in Humanae vitae, was to name first among the ways of living responsible parenthood (10).  
I think it is accurate to say that, up to the 1960s, this represented a typically Catholic approach to marriage. Moreover, as just about every parish priest knew, this approach was being lived quite naturally by many couples who had basically placed the planning of their marriage in God's hands. Use of the rhythm method was considered an exceptional recourse which, in accordance with Church teaching, was justified only if it corresponded to grave reasons, normally of a medical or financial nature.  
It was no accident that many vocations to the priesthood and religious life came from large families, which were real schools of generosity. The give-and-take that necessarily characterizes family life between a sizeable number of brothers and sisters teaches generosity and a concern for others in ways that remain unknown to the only child or to the boy or girl with just one brother or sister.  
As teenagers of a generation ago matured in such a family, they gradually took account of the sacrifices their parents had gone through in order to bring the family up. Often too, they could draw a contrast between their family situation and other smaller families around them, and understand that if their own family had fewer of the luxuries that other families could afford, it was because their parents had deliberately chosen to have children rather than comfort.  
In such families, too, parents were less likely to object, on grounds of family "economy", to one of their children "sacrificing" his or her life to God. If the parents had other aspiration for their children, there were always several others who could fulfil them. But of course, the matter went deeper than that. Usually, the parents of the type of family in question reacted very positively to the possible vocation of a son or daughter, and were in fact often the first to encourage it. They were well-disposed to the idea of giving one's life to God, because their own lives were already firmly placed in God's hands.  
Today, large families are a rarity, while natural family planning has been spread far and wide among practicing Catholic couples. Are there any grounds for establishing a relationship between family limitation and the decline in vocations? If there are, it seems important to take a serene look at them.  
Obviously, family planning in itself leads to smaller families and thus acts as a numerical factor contrary to vocations. That, however, is a surface consideration. The heart of the matter is that natural family planning - when there are no serious reasons for it - works powerfully in the direction of the two factors we mentioned earlier. On the one hand, it is frequently the result of a lack of readiness for sacrifice, or of the channeling of sacrifice in the direction of personal self-affirmation or simple material comfort. On the other hand, and more importantly, it involves a basic attitude of reserve with regard to God's providence.

Children and standards of life  
Since about 1960, the choice of many couples to limit their family to two or three children has corresponded less and less to any exceptional difficulty offered by the prospect of a large family, and more and more to the simple desire to avoid the normal difficulties that such a family involves. All of this has tended to bring about a radical change in the way that marriage and the family are understood. Values have become less human and more materialistic.  
People sacrifice themselves for the things they think worthwhile. The point is that fewer and fewer couples seem to feel that children - beyond one or two at the most - are worthwhile. Motor-cars, country cottages, overseas holidays - these are all now part of one's standard of life and worth working for. The more one can have of these, the better-off one is. Children are not part of one's standard of life: a family is not "better off" if it has more children. The materialistic, non-christian standard operating here should be evident.  
Until a generation ago, most Catholics would have had little difficulty in grasping the deep human truth behind those words of Pope John Paul II that we recalled in the last chapter: "it is certainly less serious [for parents] to deny their children certain comforts or material advantages than to deprive them of the presence of brothers and sisters, who could help them to grow in humanity and to realize the beauty of life at all its ages and in all its variety". Married couples today seem to find it harder to realize that children are values - of a totally unique order - , that to deprive their present children, or themselves, of further members within the family marks a serious limitation or reduction in one's standard of living, and that one only devalues human effort and sacrifice if one works for comfort, prestige, or possessions, rather than for one's children.  
A family over-geared to material comfort is certainly not the best seedbed for a vocation. Youth always retains a natural idealism; but a soft upbringing does not favor the serious flowering of ideals. It is almost impossible for a teenager to acquire a spirit of sacrifice unless he or she comes from a family where it has been present. And it will not be present in a family unless it has been first lived by the parents, who then inculcate it in their children [94].  
The consumer mentality with its emphasis on possessions and money and calculation does not favor vocations. Where the blessing of poverty of spirit is less present, people's hearts are less drawn to the service of the Kingdom of God.

Trusting God  
"Three to get married" was an apt description of the approach of a large number of practicing Catholics of a generation ago, for whom marriage was an adventure whose eventual horizons were determined by God. Married happiness and God's will were inseparably connected. God's will overshadowed everything, and not least of all the family size.  
The idea of being cooperators or "helpers of God" (I Cor 3:9) is what gives the Christian the sense of the fundamental meaning and dignity of existence. When imbued by this spirit, married people know that they too are "stewards of the mysteries of God" (I Cor 4:1), and that this implies not only a responsibility but also a privilege. They are cooperating in a design that transcends all human measurements and reference points. When this spirit is present in their parents, children learn it almost without noting. When it is absent, their own lives are not likely to be stirred at the idea of embarking on an adventure of faith and generosity.  
While other factors have certainly contributed to the lessening of the supernatural sense of life, family planning can do so in a particular way. With the family planning approach, the divine plan of marriage is no longer unconditionally accepted. God, and God's Will, are kept at a certain distance. The "three to be married" idea is no longer taken seriously. Christian marriage, like secular marriage all around, is reduced to a tandem affair: "just we two". God is no longer welcomed, from the outset, as the senior and more experienced partner. Couples still hope to be blessed with happiness in marriage; but they no longer seem sure about who is going to do the blessing or how it is to come about. Insofar as they hope or pray for God to do it, they are very reserved as regards the extent to which he may wish to bless them with children. It is they, not God, who will decide how far children are to be considered a blessing.  
A different sort of Christian family atmosphere is bound to result from this approach, which ultimately involves a radical skepticism about the idea that life is better off if left in God's hands. This idea no longer seems prevalent among married couples. One plans one's marriage as one plans one's vacation.  
Which parents, after all, most encourage their children to put their trust in God? Those who practice family planning for trivial or self-centered motives, or those who welcome the children God sends them? What a deep Christian and human truth is expressed in those words of the Catechism, where, under the heading of "The gift of children", it says: "Sacred Scripture and the Church's traditional practice see in large families a sign of God's blessing and the parents' generosity" (no. 2373; emphasis in original).  
It figures. Generous parents make for generous children; calculating parents make for calculating children. Unless parents respond generously to their own particular vocation from God, are their children likely to be generous in responding to whatever call God has for each one of them?  
A vocation to the priesthood or dedicated life involves a whole-hearted response to what is seen as a divine plan for one's life. It is the free choice of a difficult way that appears both as a challenge and as a privilege. In former times, those deeply Catholic families of the type we have mentioned sensed the great privilege involved in a son's or daughter's vocation. This is what underlaid the expostulation one mother addressed to her own children on hearing the news that a neighbor's son was going on for the priesthood: "Will none of you give me that pride?" No matter how much one discounts the possibly over-human aspects of a comment like that, it clearly shows a priority of a Christian over a material or secular outlook: the values of a parent who is convinced that it is Gods' will or providence, more than any human prudence or planning, that gives meaning to life.  
If trust in God's providence is allowed to diminish in a family, things that are then lost include the vision of difficulties and hardship as part of God's will, and therefore as ultimately good and positive. The way things are seen in this respect has a big impact on the question of perseverance of priests and seminarians. So many priests, for instance, have formed their own idea of what service of God and his people should involve, and are frustrated and disheartened if the reality is different. They would have been stronger if they had grown up in a family ready to expect anything of God.  
A word could be added on how all of this relates to the Third World in particular. The link between economics, demography and human happiness is not easily established. Some economists attribute the economic ills of the Third World to over-population. Others hold that burgeoning populations are an essential element to economic growth. For our purpose, I would rather bypass that unresolved debate, and suggest two important considerations.  
(1) Families in the Third World tend to be larger, poorer, and happier, than those in the West. It is not easy for Westerners to realize the extent to which the people of the Third World, especially in Africa, firmly convinced that children are a blessing, have a natural resistance to family planning ideas. But that resistance can be overcome, and many Western agencies - governmental and non-governmental - are spending constant effort and enormous amounts of money so as to overcome it.  
I have just said that Third World families tend to be larger, poorer and happier, than Western families. Of course, one finds exceptions, but these do not invalidate the overall fact. This points out alternatives and suggests options. Which is preferable: "larger, poorer and happier", or "smaller, richer and less happy"? Each couple must make their choice; values are certainly put to the test in the choosing.  
(2) The other point is that vocations, which are scarce in the West, are abundant in the Third World. And yet church agencies or groups are indiscriminately promoting family planning in many Third World countries, and so fostering approaches to married or family life which have arguably had very much to do with the vocations crisis facing the West.  
From long experience I know how surprised Africans are when church sources (and not just secular agencies) methodically encourage them to the use of family planning. They find it hard to reconcile their natural sense that children are a couple's first riches, and the contrary message coming to them, apparently with the claim of being gospel-backed. It means placing an uncommon stress on their faith, and on the quality of their Christian family life.  
The achievement of the Christian ideal in marriage no less than in dedicated life or in the priesthood, depends on faith, on trust in God's fatherly care, on loving acceptance of his will. The natural thing, when married people turn to priests or religious for guidance, is that they be encouraged along ways of generosity; in their hearts it is what they both expect and respect. It is no help to the solidity or happiness of their family life if they are encouraged, without serious need, to frustrate their normal longing for children and to blunt their natural readiness for generosity and sacrifice; nor does it augur well for the solution of the vocations crisis.

11. Parents, Children, and the Rules of Life  
It was years ago in Washington, D.C. The comment came from a girl recently converted to Catholicism. In a mixture of relief and joy she said to me, "The thing is, Father, you just have no idea how tough it is when you don't know the rules of life. Now at last, I know them ..."  
Her comment often comes back to me when I look at so many people today, especially so many young people, who really don't seem to know the rules of life. I suppose that, deep down inside, they must find the going very tough (however much they may try to hide it).  
Their lives certainly don't seem to offer much hope of working out well. How could they? - lives lacking in faith, in ideals, in purity, in love; lives lacking, above all, in criteria, in the ability to distinguish between good and evil, between right and wrong.  
Many parents - all of those at least who really love their children - are frightened at this panorama. Their fear is understandable. And it is understandable too that when they think of their own children (who are still perhaps very young), they ask themselves: How can we avoid this happening to our children?  
How can it be avoided? By forming them! By forming their conscience; so that they have standards, so that they know the rules, so that they can distinguish between right and wrong. And by forming their will, so that they can fight.

Conscience in Children  
A four- or five-year-old child is already able to realize that some things are right or wrong - for instance, that is wrong to do something displeasing to persons whom he knows are good. If his parents are good, he knows he does wrong if he does something they do not like. Here we see how the groundwork is already being laid for his moral life.  
The next step is very important and, if the parents are good, is easily taken. It is so important, for it relates this incipient moral conscience to the supernatural world. It helps the child see that life implies a personal relationship towards an ever-present God - who wants to be our Friend - and that moral living means keeping friendship with that God.  
We are speaking of the case of children whose parents are good (that is, who want to be good and who are fighting to be good, which is the only practical way we have of "being good" in this life). If such parents teach their child that God is good - and if the child can see, from his parents' way of acting, that they really believe this - then he will immediately know he does wrong if he does something that the good God does not want. He will realize too that he must struggle - as his parents are struggling - to behave well, to please the good God, precisely because he is good.  
One could not over-emphasize how important it is that the child grasps this initial idea of what constitutes good and evil, right and wrong. He should be taught that something is right because it pleases a good God, and that something is wrong because it displeases this good God. That this is the only foundation for a sound and healthily formed moral conscience surely becomes obvious if one thinks of that other foundation which is far too often laid: "You have got to do what your parents tell you, because if you don't they will punish you"; or "We have got to do what God commands us because if we don't he will punish us."

Love at the foundation - or fear?  
There is a complete contrast between these two foundations. And there is a complete contrast, too, between the alternative types of conscience and moral outlook built up on them. One alternative is a moral life based on love, that is, a truly Christian moral life such as is proposed to us on every page of the Gospels. The other alternative is a moral life based on fear. This latter type of life can never be truly Christian for it is lacking in that essential trust peculiar to the person who realizes he is a child of God.  
If one feels tempted to reflect that it is this latter moral attitude, with all its defects, that seems most prevalent in many souls, then it is wise to remember how it can so easily originate. Parents therefore should see what a tremendously delicate and responsible mission they have in forming their children's conscience. The outcome, after all, depends so much on how good they are or are trying to be, on the trust in God our Father that they live and communicate to their children, on the atmosphere of love, and not of repression or punishment, that predominates in their home.  
By this last point I do not mean that children need not or ought not ever be punished. There are moments when punishment is necessary. But then it should be the consequence of deliberate reflection, never of an outburst of temper. It should be proportionate to the fault committed. And if possible (a bit of thought almost always makes it possible), it should be a formative rather than a punitive punishment. In other words, it should be imposed not mainly to hurt the "delinquent" but to help him understand why what he did was in fact wrong.

Children and sin  
When and how should children be formed in an awareness of sin? We have already given a partial answer to this. Before going deeper into the matter, some further preliminary comments may be useful.  
One cannot help remarking on the peculiarity of the fact that today, though we hear more and more about conscience, we seem to hear less and less about sin. A greater sensitivity to the voice of conscience should logically, one feels, lead to a greater sensitivity to sin: that is, to the occasions when we disobey that voice. If it is not so in practice, surely this is a sign of the superficiality with which the whole subject of conscience tends to be treated nowadays?  
There is an undeniable tendency today to speak less of personal sin. It so happens, moreover, that this tendency seems to grow acute when the subject of "children and sin" comes up for discussion. "Take care!" - one seems to hear a chorus of voices - "Take care not to speak to children about sin. Talking about sin so easily does such harm to their normal psychological development!"  
What can in fact do harm to a child's normal psychological development is ignorance in this matter. Once children are old enough to understand that a particular action can offend God, they should not be left in ignorance of the fact that such actions are sinful, for then there is a danger that they will develop a habit in that area; and the more time is let pass, the harder it will be to correct that harmful habit.  
At times one gets the impression that the reason why some people are so reluctant to treat of the subject of sin with children, is that they themselves were victims of that type of education which treats of sin in terms of punishment and of the relation of the soul with God in terms of fear. If this is so, it would certainly seem preferable that they should not treat of the subject with children (let others do it), because in all probability they will deform them, creating in them a conscience whose dominant principle is fear. And a conscience deformed in this way certainly does harm.  
But what we saw earlier ought to make it clear that this is not how children should be taught to understand sin. They should be taught to understand it in the first place not as something worthy of punishment (which is a purely self-concerned view), but as something showing a lack of love (for it is an offense against Someone who is good); that it shows ingratitude towards Someone who loves us infinitely; that this is why we should be sorry for it; and that it is so easily made up for because God's Love is always quick to pardon. Teaching about sin, if done in this way, is always formative. Therefore, the sooner it is begun, the better.

Sin and things that are "wrong"  
Is everything that is wrong a sin? Not necessarily. There are some (few) things that can be wrong without their "wrongness" involving moral evil, and therefore without their constituting a sin. Much of what people classify as bad manners falls into this category. Faults of this type may be socially wrong, but generally speaking they are not morally wrong. (They could of course constitute a moral fault if the failure to observe them involved a lack of charity). No doubt one should correct these conventional faults since they can make social life more difficult for those who commit them or have to put up with them. But such faults are usually not a sin, and to tell children that they are can only create difficulties for the proper formation of their conscience.  
To avoid creating such difficulties parents need to exercise a very strict control over their own reactions. When they feel the impulse to correct or punish something they feel is wrong in their children, it would always be wise for them to take time off to ask themselves: "But, is this really wrong before God?"  
No doubt they may often conclude that it is, because God does not want children to tell lies, or not to learn to control their bad temper, or to be thoughtless about other people (and this includes their obligation to respect their parents' legitimate - though self-sacrificing - right to rest), and so on.  
But perhaps on other occasions, after having thought it out well, their conclusion will be No; because they are prepared to admit that what God does not want is parents who let their nerves get the better of them, or who are too easy on themselves at the same time as they are tyrants over their children, simply implanting in the home the type of living conditions which suit them best. Parents need to be on the lookout for a special type of temptation - which is always lurking along the way of parenthood - which is the temptation to classify as faults in their children things that are really no more than children's natural reaction towards faults in their parents. Parents should keep their minds clear on this point: if something is not wrong before God, however "wrongly" it may be suited to the parents' whims or preferences, then it simply is not wrong at all. It should not be met with angry reactions or punishment, and less still should it be labelled sinful.

Sin as selfishness  
There is another idea that children easily understand and can help them towards a right understanding of sin: the idea that it is bad to be selfish. Even among themselves, children quickly recognize selfishness and realize that there is something poor and despicable about this being "out for oneself". This almost instinctive understanding of the mean quality of selfishness can be very useful in helping children understand the badness of sin. Sin is, first and foremost, an offence against God. This is its theological essence. Any theory or explanation of sin which overlooked this essence and presented it simply as some sort of failing on a purely human or social level, would be absolutely deformative. Nevertheless, when teaching children that sin offends God - who is good - one should teach them that it offends him precisely because it is an expression of selfishness; and God does not want us to be selfish, because self-seeking renders our salvation difficult and makes any real happiness, even in this life, impossible. This, then, is his will and the purpose of his commandments; to teach us to fight against our self-centered tendencies, to help us learn to love, and so to enter on the way to happiness.  
Children should be taught that there are many ways of offending God by being "out for oneself." There are many forms of selfishness: the selfishness of pride (which is at the root of all other sins, and present in each one of them), the selfishness of lying, greed, covetousness, anger, envy, laziness, sensuality ...; the self-seeking, in a word, of each of the capital sins.

Children and mortal sin  
Every selfish action, after all, is a sin, even though it may be just a very venial sin. To seek oneself means necessarily to turn one's back on God, however partially. Experience teaches us that children can be selfish, so we should find no difficulty in realizing that they are capable of committing venial sins - which simply means being selfish in little things.  
But are children capable of committing mortal sins? Can a ten-year old child for instance, commit a mortal sin? I think that he or she can. In fact I think that this conclusion becomes inescapable if one simply asks oneself: are children, who are certainly capable of being selfish in little things, capable of being selfish in big ones? I think that they are. I think that a ten-year old child is capable of selfishness in a big degree, even to a total degree - in other words, that he is capable of an action by which he centres totally on himself and turns his back completely on God and on others. And that constitutes a mortal sin.  
No doubt more than one reader will find this conclusion hard to accept. But if anyone won't accept that a ten-year old child can commit a mortal sin, than let him say when a child can commit such a sin. At what age would he place the beginning of the capacity of sinning mortally: at age fourteen and not at thirteen? At thirteen, and not at twelve?  
It would probably help if we went into this a bit more deeply, and the matter certainly deserves it. A mortal sin is any action which, by centering us completely on ourselves, necessarily breaks our friendship with God. To my mind, a child aged ten is capable of such an action. Think for example of the case of a child who comes to Confession and accuses himself of one of the following: "I deliberately stole one of my brothers things, just to see him fly into a rage". "I hate so-and-so; I'm going to get my own back on him, and I'm not prepared to forgive him". "I did such-and-such, on purpose, so as to make my grand-dad lose his temper". "I spent the whole week hoping my mother would have an accident and really hurt herself ..."  
I do not say that these are necessarily grave sins. But it doesn't seem impossible to me, or even very difficult, for a sin of this type to cut one's friendship with God, because it can easily imply a gravely self-centered human attitude by which one places one's self at the center of one's own life, looking for self-satisfaction even at the cost of making others suffer. Such an action may therefore easily imply a proud and self-sufficient rejection of loyalty and dependence towards God and other people.

Sin, selfishness, and Hell  
But - I hear a voice saying - are you actually suggesting that if a child committed one of these sins and died suddenly, he would go to Hell?  
Now this perhaps reveals the real difficulty that we all feel about the idea of mortal sin. If we find it hard to accept the suggestion that a child is capable of sinning mortally, could it be because we find it hard to accept the suggestion that we ourselves are capable of sinning mortally and so meriting Hell?  
To clear up this objection, the first thing is to recall that God loves us, that he wants all men to be saved (cf 1 Tim 2:4), that he is determined to get us to Heaven. We should therefore get rid of those imaginative ideas about the person who spends a lifetime struggling to behave well but finally has one bad slip and, having the hard luck to die before he can get to Confession, goes to Hell. God, if he can, does not call a person at the wrong moment. He wants to call all of us at a right moment. But it is here that our free will has its part to play, for good or bad. We are capable of making the right moments fewer and fewer and the wrong moments more and more frequent ... and if we do so we are obviously reducing the possibilities of death overtaking us in a right moment.  
Going a little deeper, I would say that while mortal sin does in fact merit Hell, what lands people in Hell in practice is unrepented mortal sin. Even though a person commits many mortal sins, he will be saved if he repents. And (here we link up with our main subject) it should be emphasized that our conscience - if it is well formed and if it is followed - is our closest and most intimate ally to help us repent if we have had the misfortune to commit a mortal sin.  
God wants to call us at a right moment. And he has so made us that if we offend him seriously by yielding to selfishness in a grave matter, it is hard for us not to realize the fact, because our conscience protests and, deep down inside, we are lacking in peace and happiness until - like the Prodigal Son - we repent and turn back towards our Father God. Conscience exerts a lot of pressure (it is God's grace pressing us through conscience), and the pressure does not ease up until we react and repent. This, please God, is what we normally do, and do quickly, when we sin. But there are many dangers. We may not have a well-formed conscience. We may have got used to not examining it or not obeying it. We may have an insensitive conscience (it is precisely when one does not obey one's conscience that there is the greatest danger of its becoming dulled and insensitive). In such cases, even if we commit grave sins, our repentance can become less immediate, our acts of contrition less frequent, our self-centeredness deeper and more continuous, our attitude of coldness towards God's friendship more deep-rooted, our rejection of his pardon more and more radical.  
This is what can happen when a person's conscience does not work well; when he starts telling himself that there is little to worry about in sins that are in fact grave, when he lends a deaf ear to the protests of his conscience, when he does not obey it, when he refuses to repent. It is in this way that a person can fall little by little into total self-centeredness and self-sufficiency; incapable therefore of loving, which means incapable of entering Heaven - where only those able to love gain entry.

Continuous rectification  
A single act of grave selfishness is not likely to take anyone to Hell. It is the state of grave selfishness - the state of obstinate and complete self-centeredness involving the definitive rejection of God's mercy and friendship - that takes people to Hell. A single act of grave selfishness, a single mortal sin, does indeed break one's friendship with God. But if this happens, there is our conscience reproaching us for our conduct, prodding us with its protests, so that we will rectify.  
The person who knows how to rectify immediately shows he has a sensitive conscience. By sinning he separated himself from God. By rectifying he undoes that separation. His rectification may even represent such a step forward that he ends up with a greater degree of love than he possessed before.  
What, however, of the person who does not rectify immediately and keeps on postponing his repentance? Such delays are an unmistakable sign that he attaches little importance to the life of grace, to friendship with God. Every day of delayed repentance is a step towards a state where he has lapsed into complete coldness, where his conscience has been definitively silenced, and where there is practically nothing left that could effect a conversion and make the rebirth of grace possible.  
That is the state that really threatens us. The danger is all the greater in that one comes to such a state little by little and with relative ease (if one ignores one's conscience); and once one falls into it, it is usually extremely hard to get out again.  
We should not find it so difficult, therefore, to accept the possibility that any one of us could go to Hell. All that is needed is to forget about one's conscience: refusing to examine it or listen to it or obey it... All that is needed is to develop the facility (which is very easily developed) of finding an excuse for everything one does. All that is needed, in short, is not to face up to the hard and constant work of rectification implied in Christian living. "We must face up to our personal miseries and seek to purify ourselves... The power of God is made manifest in our weakness and it spurs us on to fight, to battle against our defects, although we know that we will never achieve total victory during our pilgrimage on earth. The Christian life is a continuous beginning again each day. It renews itself over and over" [95].  
It seems obvious that the best way to avoid attaching too little importance to big sins is to attach the right importance (which will be neither exaggeratedly great nor exaggeratedly small) to little sins. To say the same thing in clearer words, the best way to ensure that one will repent of one's possible mortal sins is to repent of one's actual venial ones. I would therefore assert - in flat contradiction to ideas that are being pressed into circulation today - that to encourage children, from their early years, to confess their sins (which will normally be small sins) frequently in Confession, is a marvellously effective means towards the healthy and balanced formation of their moral conscience. Of course, the reasons that make frequent Confession healthy for little children make it, if anything, healthier still for us adults.

MORAL FORMATION: FURTHER GUIDELINES  
The formation of conscience, in the case of children and young people, is a long and continuous process. Proper training given at school will help. Nevertheless, the process should not only be initiated in the home but must be fundamentally carried through there. The following points may guide parents in this continuing task.

The sense of moral duty  
It is vital to ensure that the child is little by little acquiring a proper sense of moral duty; that he is gradually grasping why we ought to do certain things and avoid others... One must try to get him to understand that we are not animals; we do not grow automatically; we are not yet stamped with our final make; we can work out well or badly; we are on our way; we can arrive or not; we can be saved or we can be condemned. That is why God, out of love, signposts the way for us. We are obliged to follow his indications if we want to get to our goal which is Heaven. But the obligation we are under is moral, not physical. God does not physically oblige us to do what he wants, to follow the way that he has signposted for us. He leaves us with our freedom. And we are left with the alternatives and consequences of our freedom. We are left with the alternative of either following his indications (because we trust him, because we believe that they are indications given by Truth and Love), or of not following them (because our laziness is reluctant to make the effort they involve, or because our pride is not prepared to accept the Truth or to understand the Love behind them). But, if we fail to follow his indications, we are not left with the alternative of not suffering the consequences, for that would be not only morally but physically impossible.  
If we do not follow his indications - apart from offending him (because we reject an expression of his love) - we will not arrive. A traveller who takes to the road with the idea of getting to New York is free to follow the roadsigns or not to follow them. But if he does not follow them, he won't get to New York.  
Freedom and responsibility are two basic topics in morality. Moreover, they are correlative topics, in such a way that one cannot be considered apart from the other [96]. Young people today, at least from the age of twelve or thirteen on, are being subjected to growing pressures to understand freedom as the right to do anything without having to think of the consequences or having to bear them; we should therefore try to help them understand that freedom so conceived is not freedom. It is irresponsibility. Or, if they prefer, it is irresponsible freedom - but this does not mean that one does not have to answer for it. They should understand that responsibility always accompanies freedom. We can forget about it, but we cannot get away from it. Sooner or later it always catches up with us. We will all have to answer for our free actions, and perhaps especially for our irresponsible free actions.  
The fact is that young people today (and not only young people) find themselves submerged in an immense fog of confusion surrounding this subject of freedom. It is beyond our scope to consider who or what has caused the fog. But my experience is that people are greatly helped to see through it if they are reminded of an elementary and obvious principle - the principle that if we are free to do this or choose that, we are not free to avoid the unavoidable consequences of what in fact we do or choose... I am free to jump out of the twelfth-floor window; but if I do, I am not free to avoid the consequence of bashing my head in on the sidewalk. I am free to try drugs, but if I do, I am not free to avoid the consequence of becoming enslaved to them.

Positive reasons  
When it comes to specific obligations or prohibitions, parents should always make the effort to explain the positive reasons behind them, the positive objectives they are meant to facilitate.  
"You shouldn't do that because it is wrong." This is not a formative "explanation"; it tends rather to deform. It leaves the child with a restrictive and negative idea of morality - which is just the opposite of the idea of Christian morality they should be getting.  
"Why do we have to go to Mass?" Not just to fulfil a commandment (a commandment is not an end in itself), but to worship God; to take part together in the Sacrifice of Jesus Christ. One should always underline the purpose of the commandments.  
"Why should we pray?" Not just because it is commanded, not even "because that is what every good Christian does", but in order to learn to talk with God, to get on speaking terms with him.  
"Why must we not tell lies?" Because it means misusing the faculty which God has given to us in order to communicate with other people; a lie is a wedge that separates us from God and from others.  
Today's unsettled and confused world presents constant opportunities for clarifying moral standards. Parents should not miss these opportunities offered by newspapers, magazines, television shows, etc., and they should be on the lookout for those that crop up in family conversations.  
The moment comes (perhaps not much after the age of nine or ten) when the question "Why can't I see that film or read that book?" is seriously put and has to be seriously answered: "Because it can do you harm," telling them what that harm is: it can take away your freedom to love, for purity is a condition of love; it can turn you into a slave of your body ...  
The task of forming young people's standards in the matter of purity is a particular responsibility of parents. It should be parents who teach their children "gradually about the origins of life, in accordance with their mentality and capacity to understand, gently anticipating their natural curiosity. I consider this very important. There is no reason why children should associate sex with something sinful or find out about something that is in itself noble and holy in a vulgar conversation with a friend. This can also be an important step in strengthening the friendship between parents and children preventing a separation in the early moments of their moral life." (Conversations, no. 100). It is a task to be fulfilled by stages. But the starting point, and the basic point to be emphasized at all times, is that the differences between the sexes - as well as sexual attraction and sexual union - are part of God's creation. They are God's way to raise up new lives, within marriage, thereby associating man in his creative task. Sex, then, has something sacred about it, as being particularly related to God's plans for mankind. And sacred things that are specially tied into God's plans must be also particularly directed to the purpose that God has assigned to them. If this is difficult in the case of sex - because our passions, which are good in themselves, are disordered - then we simply have to learn to control our passions and direct sex to its end. Explanations along these lines will teach children to have a high regard for the virtue of chastity and will make it easier for them, when they begin to run into difficulties, to live this virtue positively and to look for the support of divine grace in order to strengthen their own human endeavors.  
It is essential to begin this work of sex education in good time, without losing sight of two fundamental guidelines:  
a) the idea of reverence has to be gotten across when dealing with this topic;  
b) the idea of reverence has to be gotten across before the topic becomes a matter of temptation. Later on may be too late.

Not every restriction limits our freedom  
Nevertheless, one should not lose sight of the fact that the first reaction of young persons (and more surprisingly, of many who are not so young) when they come up against a restriction, is to see in it a limitation of their freedom. One should explain to them, time and again, that this is not necessarily so: that not all restrictions imply a limitation of freedom. It is not hard to get them to understand that energy always needs to be controlled if it is to serve any useful purpose: the energies of a river need to be dammed; the energy of steam needs to be built up inside a boiler; gasoline needs to be compressed and exploded inside a cylinder. Human energies likewise need to be channeled. And if we are meant to apply certain restrictions to them, this is so that we can use these energies throughout our life with greater effect and greater freedom.  
One of the simplest and clearest examples to illustrate this point is a road. A road is a restriction. It is a restricted area. It has a limited paved width. It has its curves and its cambers ... And if one wants to keep on the road, one has to accept and follow all these restrictions. But they do not limit us: not at least if one understands what a road is for - which is to bring us to a definite destination. And that is what life is for also.  
We would be inclined to question the I.Q. of a driver who set out on a drive with the fixed idea that this driving must be absolutely restrictionless. "Now look at that curve, for instance, that they have just plunked in front of me. I'm not going to stand for it..." If he drives straight on instead of following the curve, this apparent affirmation of his freedom is going to end him up at the bottom of a ditch or wrapped round the nearest tree.  
An expressway makes the example even clearer. It has limited entrance and exit points. It has maximum speed limits and, at times, even minimum speed limits. Nevertheless, no one regards the limitations of an expressway as restrictions on his freedom but rather as factors that favor the most effective use of that freedom.  
Training one's will  
Children need to be helped to understand that if they have no will power, they will be no good for life. An athlete exercises and trains his muscles so as to be in shape for running. If he didn't train them, his body would let him down. In a similar fashion we have to train our will - exercising the "muscles" of the will by means of little efforts and sacrifices - so as to be in shape for life. Boys or girls who reach maturity - in terms of age - but with practically no will power, are not mature. They are not fit for life. They could be compared to a ship without a rudder or a car without a steering wheel. The practical side of moral formation is simply aimed at making each one master of his or her own life. This is what the moral struggle is about: being in charge - or not - of one's life. It is only by dint of victories - despite some defeats - that one becomes master. And being master means that, with the help of God's grace, a person can take his life where he wishes; and not be left drifting, under the control of a thousand things - environment, fashions, friends, passions, laziness - that are not his own proper personality, his own essential self.

Defeats  
Children need not only to be told - insistently - that life is a struggle. They also need to be told not to be surprised if the struggle turns out to be a hard one, and not to be dismayed if at times they get the worst of it. They will face up to their defeats if we have told them, no less insistently, that God understands us, that he loves us even with our weaknesses, and that he wants to help us. We should therefore have limitless confidence in him. They should be taught to ask him for pardon many times a day (a practice that, far from being burdensome, is a constant reminder that a life lived in God's presence is a life lived in the presence of Love, and that to ask for forgiveness is the reaction of a person in love. The person who stops asking for forgiveness has stopped loving). They should be taught to make their examination of conscience, very briefly and very simply, each night. And, I repeat, one of the best ways of ensuring that their conscience is being properly formed, without their being saddled with scruples or slipping into laziness, is to encourage them to take up the custom of frequent Confession; from the earliest moment (which should certainly be no later than the age of six or seven) when they are capable of understanding the meaning of offense and the meaning of forgiveness.

Sensitivity to grace  
Children, we have said, need a keen awareness not only of the fact that life is a fight, but also of the fact that we are not alone in that fight. They need to acquire a sensitivity to grace: to sanctifying grace which makes us children of God; and to actual grace, that help from God which gives light to our minds and strength to our wills so that we keep on fighting and learn to conquer in the fight.  
If the father and mother go to Confession and Communion frequently, if they pray, if they visit the Blessed Sacrament, their children will observe that their parents are relying on divine grace to help them in their struggle, and they will learn to do likewise.

Children need to see their parents' example  
Parents should give their children clear ideas. But if they want them not only to have a well-formed conscience, but to follow it, then they should not only give them clear ideas, they should also give them clear example. Parents whose children never see them struggling to improve - with ups and downs, but determinedly and with a resilient spirit - will never educate their children well. If the children do not see, for instance, that their father or mother is fighting so as not to give way to nerves - and that both say they are sorry when they fail - then they are not receiving much in the way of example.  
An important part of this example lies in the readiness of the parents to impose restrictions on themselves. Children should see that their parents too are prepared to deny themselves things, even though they find them attractive: that their parents can say No - also to themselves - even when it is hard. If a mother, for example, wants to form her daughters in a strongly independent attitude towards fashions, she herself must have that same attitude. It is not infrequent to hear mothers complain about how girls today are carried away by fashion or environment. One wonders if those mothers have asked themselves how often they have gone against the mainstream of their environment or have said No to the "imperatives" of fashion ....  
The same goes for fathers... (as if fashion didn't influence them too!). If what moves a man when he buys a bigger and more powerful car, is no real family or professional need, but simply the fact that a colleague of his has bought a similar model, are his arguments likely to carry much conviction when he tries to persuade his son that a motorcycle is not a "need" for a sixteen-year-old boy?  
Parents who want to have children with a sensitive conscience and a strong will, must keep up a constant struggle to acquire these qualities themselves.

Moral decontamination  
Here we would do well to give more detailed consideration to the subject of films, books, and other forms of entertainment.  
If people have the right to expect that the proper authorities will take measures to prevent the streets being littered with refuse, they have a similar right - and the public authorities have a corresponding duty to ensure - that "moral filth" should not be spread around the streets and public places.  
How sadly ironic it would be if, just as public opinion is waking up to the reality and dangers of environmental contamination, it remained asleep to the infinitely more harmful reality of the moral contamination of our social atmosphere.  
If certain individuals wish to poison themselves, in private, that is their business. What is not their business or their right is to claim, in the name of freedom, that poison should be freely sold - or, rather, dearly sold - at every street corner; especially when the poison in question has a particular attraction that makes it peculiarly dangerous.  
In many parts, the public authorities are no longer taking any steps to check the moral pollution of our cities and countryside. At times they try to justify their inactivity by the argument that "after all, we haven't any really scientific proof of the harmful effects of pornography", and so on. To know the harmful effects of pornography, one doesn't have to wait for the findings of science. One has only to use one's common sense! This, I fear, leaves one doubting the competence of these authorities to govern, for common sense is surely a first requisite for a governor. Of course it may well be that governmental passivity regarding moral contamination is due not so much to a lack of common sense as to the fear of using it, the fear of drawing down on oneself outraged cries of "puritanism," "censorship" etc. which pressure-groups of liberated citizens always manage to orchestrate so effectively. If this is what is paralyzing public authorities, then it is not just common sense that they are lacking, but something much more important: courage - the courage to govern - and a genuine concern for the good of the people.  
In all fairness to the authorities it must be said that they would react if they felt that public opinion were in favor of measures of moral decontamination, in favor of the maintenance of certain clear conditions of moral hygiene and cleanliness in public life. But public opinion is mainly made up of parents. And many parents seem to be asleep. Or perhaps, like the authorities we mentioned a moment ago, they too are lacking in common sense and courage.  
For those who are not asleep, but may be in danger of getting drowsy, here are a few considerations that can help wakefulness.

Self-censorship  
Films, television and reading matter have a tremendous influence nowadays on everyone: especially on young people, though also on the not-so-young. Furthermore, it is sadly undeniable that very few modern films or novels do not influence people negatively - especially if one bears in mind that the damage is caused not just by pornographic scenes or passages but by the whole concept of life underlying these works. Materialism is exalted. Pleasure-seeking is the real life-rule. Violence is a positive value. Divorce is a sign of civilized progress. Adultery, free love, homosexuality, what-have-you, are to be looked on as something perfectly normal and natural. Film ratings are often very little to go by. An "adult" movie - with its implication that it is suitable for "mature" viewers - is usually not suitable for anyone who doesn't want to offend God. A person is mature, in this field, when he or she is sincere enough to recognize what is degrading, and strong enough to avoid it.  
Censorship imposed from above may achieve certain results. It may achieve a clean atmosphere in the home or in the street that favors the normal development of a person's affections and passions and avoids the pathetic abnormalities produced by obsession.  
But this positive effect will be very limited if it is not accompanied by another achievement - which is to get young people to understand that, in this field, each one of us has to be his own "censor". Clean, happy and free (free also to love): that is how we want to see our young people grow up in this world. And they won't ever grow that way if they don't understand the principle and live the practice of self-censorship - which is the only really effective type of censorship that exists. Self-censorship involves a combination of clear ideas and strong will. It means having a clear realization of the damage one can suffer through the obsessing effect of certain shows or literature, or certain ways of behaving. It also means having enough will-power to say No to easy slaveries and to fight that difficult but happy fight by which a person defends his freedom, his capacity to love, and his soul.

Permissive parents (permissive with their children)  
In this matter, just as in all aspects of moral education, we repeat that one should always try to give positive arguments. Nevertheless, as we said earlier on, one does not easily get children to understand that a restriction or a prohibition can be positive. Their reaction, if they are told No, is much more likely to be one of protest and resentment. Faced with the pressures created by permissiveness, many parents yield... They yield, thinking perhaps: "If I don't give way, my children won't obey me. So, either way, they are going to do what they like." Well, I would tell those parents that they have a grave obligation to give clear and firm guidance to their children in these matters, even though they suspect or are sure their children won't heed them.  
Modern times are hard times, at least for people's souls. Let us take the case of children of permissive parents (that is, weak parents). The boys or girls read or see whatever they want, go wherever they wish, do whatever they feel like. Their parents are worried, and are right to be worried. They talk things over between themselves. But they don't dare to say anything to their children.  
What is the likely result, ten or twenty years later? A ruined life: lost faith, broken marriage, total loneliness. But ... surely my parents must have known that I was heading this way? Then, why didn't they try at all costs to stop me? And to the desolation of a ruined life is added the bitterness of feeling oneself betrayed by one's own parents, the victim of their lack of courage and love.  
Take the same case, but let's suppose that the parents do put their foot down, lovingly but firmly. Perhaps the boy or girl doesn't heed them either, and the same result seems predictable - but with one difference. In the midst of the same desolation, the thought can come: My parents realized that this is how I could end up. And they did all they could stop me. I didn't heed them, but ... they loved me! My father and my mother loved me! Such a conviction could be sufficient to keep a person from final despair. My parents loved me! Does it seem small comfort in the midst of a ruined life? It could be enough for salvation.

Soft parents (soft with themselves)  
In any case, many years' experience tells me that if children at times don't obey their parents in these matters, the most frequent reason is that the parents are too soft, not so much with their children, as with themselves. They are not prepared to demand of themselves or to deny themselves enough. They are too selfish.  
Let us be sincere. The most convincing (and at times the only effective) argument that parents can and should give their children, when telling them they cannot see a particular show or film or read a particular book, is that they themselves - the parents - are not going to allow themselves to see or read it either.  
If parents are not ready to impose censorship on themselves whenever it is called for, then their efforts to impose it on their children will necessarily prove deformative.  
Let me allow for one particular type of case before proceeding. The themes of certain productions may be sufficiently delicate or complex so as to call for a greater than average degree of experience or of an informed criterion in order to be able to digest them. In such cases, some parents may reasonably feel that their children do not yet possess that criterion or experience, while they do. (Other parents, however, may feel that such works, especially if they are televised, offer a good opportunity to hold a commentated viewing session with their children. The effect then may well be that the parents will enjoy the production less, but their children's outlook will have been more formed and matured.)  
Such productions offer no special problem, and I am not thinking of them. I am thinking of the thousands of works - on stage, screen and in print - surrounding us today which are becoming more and more filled with the most explicit pornography. It is in relation to these works that parents have to face up to the need for "self-censorship."  
Let's not beat about the bush. Pornography means a degrading representation of the sacred reality and the God-given gift of sex. And the person who accepts pornography in his readings or in the shows he sees, offends God gravely, degrades himself and gives a degrading example to others. Such is the case of the person who is not mature enough to apply self-censorship in foreseeable and unforeseen cases. Maturity means avoiding readings or shows that one can reasonably foresee will have a pornographic content. And when one has not had sufficient foresight, maturity means throwing a book aside immediately if one finds pornographic passages in it, or getting up and marching out of a show that defrauds his or her expectations and turns out to be degrading.

Double moral standards  
If, in these matters, parents try to hold on to certain "freedoms", which they deny to their children, it is only logical that the children lay a claim to these "freedoms" and determine to win them for themselves in open rebellion or simply behind their parents' backs.  
The conclusion is inescapable. There is only one way by which young people can grasp the meaning of true freedom, and learn how it must be lived and how it must be defended, and that is by the example they see in older people - above all and before anyone else, in their own parents.  
Those parents who are not prepared to live self-censorship in this matter are guilty of appealing to a two-faced moral code. They have two standards of morality: one for themselves and another for their children. They are thus justifying - in their children's eyes - the accusation of hypocrisy which is often hurled by contemporary young people against their elders. And they are practically guaranteeing that their children will neither respect nor obey them.  
Facts are facts, and some truths are no less true for being bitter. Parents cannot expect their children to follow the right road if they are determined to travel on the wrong one. They cannot expect their children to be honest if they are deep in the practice of deceit, especially of self-deception. They cannot expect their children to be strong if they are weak - especially if their weakness is that very special type of weakness that is becoming so common in our contemporary societies: not just the natural weakness of feeling the attraction of impurity (which is a weakness that all of us can feel, though we all have the power to resist it), but the unnatural mental and moral weakness of denying that impurity means degradation and corruption. Let us add, therefore, that it is not all that clear that modern young people are so wrong in their accusation on this point, because the attitude of a sizeable sector of our contemporary "adult" world really merits no other description than that of hypocritical. Only a hypocrite invokes a double standard of morality: a permissive standard for himself, and a more exacting one for his children. Only the hypocrite presents himself as incorruptible, which is what is done by anyone who denies he has any selfish tendencies to fight against. Only the hypocrite says he loves his children when by his deliberate example he is destroying them.  
But our contemporary teenage world itself - with its tendency to speak and act as if young people too were "incorruptible," as if there were no such thing as sin or personal self-seeking or a conscience that protests or the need to repent - is by no means free from this hypocrisy. It should admit that there is no other name to be given to these attitudes in its case either; and that there is little excuse, for the hypocrite, in having learned his hypocrisy from his elders.

Sincerity in parents  
If parents are not sincere, children won't be either. And without sincerity, the whole question of moral struggle is a waste of time. Sincerity is an essential factor in the proper formation of conscience (just as it is a guarantee of its continuing health). Sincerity is so important because it implies acknowledging the truth, "walking in the truth" - even if at times the truth is not as one would have liked. The persons who acknowledge that they have not acted as they would have wished may, with God's grace, end up by attaining their wish. Only the traveller who recognizes he is on the wrong road has any chance of getting back onto the right one.  
It is a bad lookout if parents do not manage to get their children to be sincere with them, owning up when they have done something wrong. It is a bad lookout if children lie to their parents. But if it does happen, what should parents do to remedy the situation? They should be sincere with their children; they should not lie to them!  
At times one has to get cross with children. But it should be crossness without anger. Parents have the obligation (in justice and charity) to correct their children, but without going too far. To get over-cross is to get cross unjustly. Now, if a father or mother gets annoyed unjustly and does not acknowledge the fact (by apologizing), there is not only injustice but insincerity. The parent realizes that he or she has been wrong, but does not want to acknowledge it. And that is very like lying.  
Children know their parents well. They know them with both their virtues and their defects. Such a deep knowledge is logical and inevitable, as the simple consequence of having shared the same home for so many years. Therefore, any attempt on a father's or mother's part to hide their defects from their children is foredoomed to failure. Let us imagine the case of a five-year-old child with an ill-tempered father who does not fight to control his temper, and is not even sincere enough to acknowledge that he has this defect. Perhaps the child does not know that bad temper is a defect, particularly if (as often happens) no one in that home dares to suggest it is. All that the child knows is that it is one of his father's characteristics whose unpleasant effects at times reach him in the form of bellows and blows.  
Bad humor, however, breeds bad humor. So, the most probable outcome is that the child himself will develop a most awful temper, without knowing how to control it (or even perhaps that it can be controlled) since no one is teaching him how. When that same child has reached the age of fifteen he will almost certainly know that bad temper is a defect, although perhaps, following his father's example, he will not want to admit that it is in his case (there are always excuses!). Total result of this situation: the child will not only have acquired the same defect as his father, but also, in all probability, he will neither respect his father nor love him.

Parents' defects as a formative factor  
In the case just given, there is a point that should not be overlooked. The basic reason for the child's deformation (and for his consequent lack of love for his father) was not the father's defect, but rather the father's lack of struggle against the defect and, above all, the father's insincerity as regards the undeniable fact that it was a defect.  
What is a cause of deformation (and therefore of scandal) for a boy or girl is not to have parents with defects (for that is inevitable), but to have insincere and hypocritical parents: parents who have defects but won't admit it; parents who invariably try to justify or camouflage their defects - under a screen of lies, flare-ups of rage, or abuses of authority - because, when all is said and done, they are just not ready to fight against them.  
Their parents' defects should not be a motive of scandal for children, nor even a motive to respect or love them less. None of this will happen if they see that their parents are conscious of those defects, that they acknowledge them and are trying to fight against them. Then the defects of the parents - their sincere fight against their defects - will become a marvellous example and encouragement to the children, to want to do likewise in their own lives. Curiously enough, children tend to have much greater understanding towards their parents when they see them fight against their defects; and so the very parental defects help the children to respect and love their father and mother more.  
This can be the last conclusion of this chapter. The way parents look at and tackle their own defects is, humanly speaking, perhaps the factor that most influences their children's moral formation, their growth in sound conscience, and their development of character.  
Parents don't need to be geniuses or great psychologists in order to form their children well. They simply need to love them truly, with a love that combines sacrifice, affection, and fortitude. They don't need to be saints either - though they should always keep up the hope that, with God's grace, they may in the end yet make it. What they do need is to struggle sincerely to live a Christian life that can be noted in the little things of each day. In words of St. Josemaria Escrivá:  
"Parents teach their children mainly through their own conduct. What a son or daughter looks for in a father or mother is not only a certain amount of knowledge or some more or less effective advice, but primarily something more important: a proof of the value and meaning of life, shown through the life of a specific person, and confirmed in the different situations and circumstances that occur over a period of time.  
"If I were to give advice to parents, I would tell them, above all, let your children see that you are trying to live in accordance with your faith. Don't let yourselves be deceived: they see everything, from their earliest years, and they judge everything. Let them see that God is not only on your lips, but also in your deeds; that you are trying to be loyal and sincere, and that you love each other and you really love them too.  
This is how you will best contribute to making your children become true Christians, men and women of integrity, capable of facing all life's situations with an open spirit" [97].

12. Ideals in Youth  
Young people have always had a great capacity for enthusiasm, for big things, for high ideals, for everything that is genuine - St. Josemaría Escrivá.  
Big Things  
The idealism of youth - what an inexhaustible subject! Psychologists explain it, educators build on it, demagogues exploit it, and (perhaps worse still) older people look on it with benevolent tolerance or cynical skepticism, and wink knowingly to one another: "They'll learn".  
Young people certainly will learn many things from their elders and from the way they live. One of the things they will not learn, one hopes, is cynicism, that is, the loss of one's ideals. Whether this occurs or not depends largely on the type of older person they happen to meet.  
If an older person takes it for granted that, though it is logical that young people have ideals, it is also logical and besides inevitable that they end up by losing them, then one can only conclude that the older person in question either does not believe much in ideals or else does not believe much in young people.  
If a parent wants a self-assessment as to how he stands on this point, he would do well to quiz himself with a few questions such as these:  
- Do I believe in the idealism of young people?  
- Do I believe that their hearts are made for big things?  
- Do I - who have to bring them up - believe in big things?  
- Are the big things I believe in big enough for their ideals?  
Only the person who can answer each of these questions affirmatively can entertain some hope of being a good parent.

Ideals in constant growth  
One of the many striking things about St. Josemaría Escrivá was his belief that young people need never lose the ideals of their youth. He rather believed that these ideals could and should grow indefinitely. He had his own experience to go by; his personal ideals grew steadily from the age of fifteen to his death almost sixty years later. And he could also go by his experience with millions of young people from all over the world.  
Josemaría was a firm believer in the idealism of the young (and the not-so-young). But, being a realist and - above all - a man of faith, he knew that the human heart was made not just for any ideals, but only for the ideals that Christ brought to earth. He knew that these are the only ideals capable of filling our hearts - to overflowing - during a lifetime. His own life was entirely devoted to incarnating these ideals and awakening them in others.  
Josemaría, I have just said, was a realist. By this I mean also that he was perfectly well aware that a young person's heart is not just a focal-point of ideals; it is a field of battle. He addressed his message to all. But his insistence that we are all called to the highest possible ideals was constantly accompanied by the reminder that we are all equally capable of the greatest possible crimes, and must therefore be prepared for a life-long struggle. Now, if the struggle hits all of us, it obviously hits harder when it hits first - which is in adolescence. Let us take a closer look at those early teen years when a boy or a girl is no longer a child, but is not yet a man or a woman either, and stands therefore in special need of his or her parents' understanding.  
The age of contrasts  
It is the age of contrasts. Life, in youth, seems bigger. It seems to offer more. It is filled with the challenge of great things. And the young person feels ready to take up the challenge. But life, in youth, also seems more complicated; and the young person finds himself or herself faced with new difficulties or with old ones that have suddenly grown worse: selfishness, sensuality, laziness, vanity, rebelliousness... It is the age of contrasts: nobleness, on the one hand; calculation on the other. It is the age of enthusiastic victories and of discouraging defeats. It is, or should be, the age of struggle. The point is well expressed in the following words of St. Josemaría, speaking to a group of young people in October 1972: "You can't give up fighting, because our life is nothing but one continuous tug-of-war. The craziest things attract us. It's humiliating, isn't it? St Augustine used to say that his passions were constantly trying to pull him to the ground. But at the same time, along with these crazy ideas, we feel a great urge to do something worthwhile, to serve other people, to live a pure life, to work in things that can help others, to sacrifice ourselves. Isn't that true too? And it is then that the struggle breaks out between our passions seeking to pull us down, and those other wonderful longings that spur us upwards. We have got to fight. There's just no alternative".  
It is elementary for a parent to realize that adolescence marks the outbreak of this war between nobleness and calculation.  
It is also obvious and elementary to be aware (and I suppose that practically everyone is aware of it) that there could be fewer more decisive proofs of being a poor parent than the readiness to spoil children by giving them whatever they ask, or allowing them whatever they want. The grown-up person who acts in this way turns himself into the accomplice of a young person's selfishness; he becomes the ally of his mean and calculating instincts, and so practically guarantees the defeat of that young person's idealism and the destruction of his generosity and capacity for sacrifice.  
It ought to be no less obvious and no less elementary to see (although my impression is that many parents do not see it) that one can prove oneself to be a bad parent by falling into another error - a subtler (but perhaps more harmful) error, which is to let the great and noble ideals of youth be edged out and replaced by limited and calculated objectives: narrow and selfish objectives which, even if at times they leave little room for laziness, always leave plenty for individualism and self-centredness; and which, whatever else they may give if achieved, cannot give happiness. Let me try to explain what I am getting at.

Ideals and objectives  
An ideal is something great. It is essentially felt to be something greater than one's self. It is something which, by the sheer force of its beauty and nobility, makes a person want to get away from himself, to forget himself, so as to defend, to admire, to love, and to serve that ideal, and strive upward toward it. A person with a true ideal is ready to live for it and, if necessary, to die for it. There are not all that many true ideals: love, family, country, God...  
An objective, in contrast, is something - felt to be of worth - that one hopes to gain and make one's own. It may be something difficult to attain. It may be something great. But it is seldom, if ever, seen as being greater than one's own self (if so seen, it would tend to turn into an ideal, to be served; or into a humiliating irritant, to be rejected or hated). An objective attracts because it promises to satisfy some specific personal desire: the desire for power or pleasure or popularity, or the simple desire to progress and improve oneself... There lies its worth.  
An objective is something that can be conquered (an ideal, never). A man should always have objectives before him because he needs always to keep moving ahead. But if he attains his objectives, there are different ways in which he can use them. He can use them as a support under his feet, as a springboard to help him reach closer to his ideal (which is still far off). Or he can just stay put, smugly looking at what he has attained, as if there was nothing more left for him to achieve. He is so proud of having achieved his objectives that he forgets his ideal, if in fact he ever had one.  
A person who has ideals will always have objectives. But some people have objectives without having ideals. If a man dreams of an ideal love, of an ideal woman, and thinks he has found her, he falls in love... His objective then will be to marry her. If they get married, he will have achieved his objective. But (if his love is real) she will continue to be his ideal and he will recognize that despite all his efforts to achieve other objectives (to keep improving in points of character, for instance) he will never be worthy of her. It would be a sad day if he ever came to feel he was at last worthy of her, and worse still if he ever felt her to be unworthy of him. Idealism would have collapsed in that marriage [98].  
The man who wants to marry for money has an objective, but not an ideal. And if he succeeds in marrying a rich heiress or the widow of a millionaire, he will have attained his objective. And that is as far as he wanted to go. Ideals just did not enter into his plans.  
A boy with no objectives is (or will turn out to be) an idle boy. Anyone can see that. But a boy without ideals is and will always be a disaster - no matter how many objectives he has or what efforts he makes to achieve them. The sad thing is that lots of parents do not see this, though it is parents who should be their children's main guides. They do not seem to understand that the objectives-without-ideals formula for life can turn out energetic people, perhaps, but not happy people. For a life without ideals can only be selfish and vain, and therefore unhappy.  
There are far too many parents around who (in relation their children and even at times in relation to themselves) cannot see the difference between high ideals and self-centered aims; between ideals that ennoble a person's character, and aims that (unless they are directed toward a higher end, a true ideal) diminish it. And so they allow or even cause the noble ideals of adolescence to be debased and turned aside into poor and inadequate objectives.  
One sees so many cases! Parents with a fairly bright son or daughter who constantly push him or her to come out number one in their class. And the young person ends up quite centered on that goal and quite satisfied to attain it. It is a very bad thing indeed to be satisfied in youth. One can think of plenty of other cases: a father with an athletic son who provides him with every sort of stimulus (clubs, coaches, trips) and so manages to turn out a boy whose one aim is to become a tennis or swimming champion; or the mother who allows (or perhaps again encourages) her teenage daughter to think that the one thing that really matters in life to be popular with boys and so she has no thoughts in her pretty little head except for clothes and other ways of attracting their attention.

What's wrong with wanting to be a tennis champion?  
"Now, just a moment," I hear the objection, "are you really suggesting that young people with brains shouldn't work to get good marks, or that kids with the making of tennis champions should not try to make it, or that girls shouldn't like making themselves up and looking attractive?" No, I am not making any such suggestions. It seems to me quite natural that young people do all of these things. What I am suggesting, however, is they should not be led or allowed to believe that, in doing them, they are striving for ideals. They are striving for aims or objectives which, I repeat, is not the same thing. What I would like to emphasize is that teenage boys or girls who simply fill their lives with these things are leaving them empty of ideals. And a life empty of ideals is heading for unhappiness. It is a tremendous pity if children or parents fool themselves on this point. It is sadder still if parents are to blame for having deceived their children on the matter.  
Isn't it true that the roads along which far too many parents seem to be pushing their children, are paths of selfishness, silly vanity, or narrow ambition? But why? Why have these parents been such poor pupils in the school of life? How is it that they are so unconcerned to spare their children, if they can, the mistakes that stand out in their own experience?

Proud of their parents?  
Later on in life, are such children likely to be proud of their parents or to be content with themselves? Are they likely to be proud of their parents later on? I don't know. I do know of boys or girls who have later on (rightly or wrongly) come to the conclusion that their parents' concern to see them "tops" in studies or sports or popularity, was more the result of the father's or mother's vanity than of a genuine respect for the young person's distinctive personality or of a more mature and deeper understanding (such as might be expected of a grown-up person) of the qualities that go to make up true happiness. (After all, one of the elementary facts of family psychology is that a parent's determination to see a son of daughter come out on top is at times the unconscious reflection of the parent's desire to compensate for the failures they themselves experienced in their own youth).  
Are such children likely to be content with themselves if, say twenty or thirty years later, they sit down to a sincere self-examination and find themselves lacking in ideals? I doubt it. Are they not rather likely to go through something similar to the experience Julien Green narrates in his Journal? At the age of forty-two, he takes a long look back, and out of his memories he fashions a dialogue with his own self of twenty-five years earlier. Rather than a dialogue, one would have to call it a sort of cross-examination to which his far-away youth, brimful of ideals, submits the miserable and impoverished reality that marks the sum total of his mature years: "You have cheated me. You have robbed me. Where are all those dreams I entrusted to you? What have you done with all of that richness I was fool enough to place in your hands? I answered for you, I was your guarantor; and you have gone bankrupt on me. I should have run away with all that was still in my possession and which you have since squandered. Far from admiring you, I despise you". And Green adds: "And what would the older of the two allege in his self-defense? He would speak of all the experience he had acquired. He would talk of his solid reputation. He would turn out his pockets, and look desperately through the drawers of his writing-desk for something to justify his life by. But he would make a bad job of his defense, and I think he would feel thoroughly ashamed of himself" [99].

Ideals and Models  
Human heroes  
Young people seldom get enthusiastic about abstract ideals. But they are easily attracted by the ideal or idealized persons or personages whom they meet in real life, or who are conjured up before them in fiction (novels, films). With this in mind, the following points may be useful:  
- Our modern world is so commercialized and so dominated by public relations, that it is often difficult to distinguish between what is real and what is fictitious. It is no exaggeration to say that the image presented to us of many real persons (pop singers, film-stars, sports figures, racing-car drivers...) is largely fictional.  
- The fictitious version of the life of a real person can exercise greater influence (and, if the "values" it offers are negative, it can do greater harm) than the presentation of the life of a fictitious person (for instance, a character in a television series), because the reader or viewer knows that the latter is fictitious, and he may think that the former is real.  
- Generally speaking, the heroes of modern novels and movies possess less human virtues than the heroes of the popular novels or stories of forty or fifty years ago. Modern 'heroes,' in fact, are often presented with a whole string of anti-hero characteristics; apart from their bravery (which at times is hardly distinguishable from the recklessness of a person who simply looks contemptuously on life), they are frequently cruel, unscrupulous, untrusting, untrustworthy, sexually promiscuous, selfish, superficial, inconstant and vain.  
- Those parents who see the seriousness of this last point would do well to try to develop - in their pre-teenage children (ten to twelve years old) - a taste for the great romantic or adventure stories of classical fiction, or for the real-life accounts of geographical exploration, scientific discovery, mountain or space conquest, and so forth. In this way they will familiarize their children with the real details - the ups and downs, the hopes and disappointments, the suffering and endurance - of true-to-life heroes. It is better if a boy's sense of hero-worship is stirred by the life and adventures of an Arctic explorer or a Himalayan mountain climber than by that of a football star or someone out of contemporary show business. Are girls more easily captivated by the tinsel glamour surrounding stars, models, pop-stars, and the like? Perhaps; and if so, it is undoubtedly harder to enthuse them with valid and healthy heroes and heroines drawn from real life. There is a special challenge here for script-writers, novelists, and other artists prepared to devote their talents to the task of creating or presenting, in literary, artistic or journalistic form, figures capable of awakening a nobler and deeper admiration among girls [100].

Parents as their children's ideal?  
Every father and mother must strive to be in some way, if not their children's ideal, at least a model for them; or rather perhaps a copy of the model. For the model and the ideal, as we will see shortly, is Someone else. But a copy, even if it is a poor copy, can get across some idea of the original.  
It should be clear, I insist, that a mother and father ought not to try to be his or her children's ideal. They won't make the grade. They're just not up to it. The father who sets out to be his son's or daughter's ideal, would be setting himself up as an idol, as a false god. The same is true for the mother. And when the let-down comes for the children (and it will come), it can turn out to be pretty costly: costly for the parent, costly for the children, and costly for the proper parent-child relationship that should exist between them.  
There is an age at which many children tend to idolize their parents, especially their father (perhaps mothers are too close to them, or too sensible, to allow it). For as long as it lasts, this idolatry may flatter a father's vanity. His common sense, however, as well as his loyalty toward his children, should make him ensure that it lasts the shortest time possible. He should be the first to stick a pin into that bubble-self and burst the false ideal, before life itself bursts it. If a boy sees that his father plays tennis much better than he does and begins to think that he plays it better than anyone, then his father should disabuse him in a hurry by the simple process of showing him a real champion. If the kid thinks his dad must be the world's number one expert in physics or astronomy, then the father might send him to an encyclopedia to look up a few Nobel Prize winners...  
The temptation of wanting to "play god" in one's own home is an absurd temptation. Yet quite a few parents toy with it for some time. Silly parents. The sensible ones step down from the pedestal as soon as possible. Sensible parents don't go around making a show of their limitations, defects, or mistakes. But they don't act the hypocrite either, trying to conceal their weaknesses from the eyes of their children. What good this sincerity on their parents' part does to the children! It teaches them that the parents are not self-satisfied or self-centred, but are living for a higher ideal.

The ideal is Christ  
Parents and teachers therefore have to be constantly on the alert so as not to adulterate young people's idealism with false ideals or unworthy idols, or let it be side-tracked into self-centered aims that only tend to make a person selfishly unhappy or consciously frustrated. What, then, are the genuine ideals that should be put before young people?  
Christian ideals, of course. Or, to be more precise, the Christian ideal - which is Christ. If Christ really and truly becomes the ideal of a person, then all his or her other true human ideals will become centered on him, and so will find support and stimulus and purification. Without Christ at the center, all the other human ideals die away.  
I wonder if this idea, that Christ should be the young person's ideal, seems surprising or insufficient or impractical. If it does, this is surely a sign of the extent to which we have depersonalized our religion, making it cold and lifeless. Is it not possible that we have reduced our religion to a sort of business transaction - getting to Heaven in exchange for observing certain rules and living within a system - when it should rather be a matter of fulfilling these rules because we love a Person, because we love Jesus Christ (and through him the Father and the Holy Spirit)? Surely it is in this way, as a Love-affair, that we should see our religion? A Love-affair that - here on earth, where we are constantly seeking and finding Our Lord, getting to know him, returning to him whenever we fail him, learning to serve him, introducing him to others - is like a prolonged but enthusiastic courtship that will reach its consummation, its full and glorious union, in eternity.  
If, despite everything, the Person of Christ, regarded as the ideal that our young people (and we ourselves) need, still seems to us too theoretical or out-of-this-world to be a practical proposition, this would be clear proof of our own lack of acquaintance and friendship with him. A little thought should help us remember where we have gone wrong.  
Do we doubt that Christ can really attract the young people of our day? How little we know him! And how little we know them! We can far too readily dismiss things like "Jesus Movements" as emotional flashes-in-the-pan and fail to see the important message they contain: that many young people, including quite a few who reject what they term "institutionalized religions", feel themselves strongly attracted by the most elementary human knowledge of the figure of Jesus.  
Yes, but what would happen if they knew him better? Some would undoubtedly abandon their enthusiasm because the real Jesus is demanding, for he is God. But many others - who have a greater instinct of generosity and know in their hearts that any worthwhile ideal involves sacrifice - would come to him because Jesus Christ, demanding as he is and all, attracts.  
Even on the purely natural level, the good parent or educator sees the native idealism of youth as a sign that young people know they are made for bigger things and are somehow restless if they cannot rise to them. For the Christian parent or educator, this idealism should be the springboard from which the young person can reach up to Christ. Perhaps the task cannot be expressed more concisely than in the formula constantly repeated by St. Josemaria Escrivá - to educate children in such a way that, from their earliest days or in full adolescence, their hearts beat to the ideal of seeking Christ, meeting him, getting to know him and making him known, following him, loving him, and remaining with him.

Christ as the Ideal  
What does it mean in practice to have Christ as one's ideal? I would suggest four main things:  
1. to be friends with Christ;  
2. to be loyal to Christ;  
3. to be proud of Christ; and (as a consequence)  
4. to want to introduce Christ to others.  
Let us see what each of these four headings may imply, and how parents or the family can help in realizing them.  
1. Friends with Christ  
Young people are hero-worshipers by nature. They find their heroes or heroines in fiction, and in real life too. There is scarcely a boy or a girl who has not a "star" to admire. They read the biographies of their stars or heroes. They get excited at the mere possibility of seeing them. And all of this is true even though they normally have to admire their heroes from a distance, probably without the chance of ever speaking with them, much less of becoming friends of theirs.  
And are we then going to suggest that Jesus Christ - perfect God and perfect Man - is not capable of attracting them? If they want a Superstar, there is Jesus. Not a poor stage parody, but the tremendous reality of the God-Man who lays down his life out of love for each one of us.  
But if one is not constantly reading the life of Jesus, how can one get to know and love him each day more and more? If someone answers, "Oh, you mean the Gospels? Why, I've read them already. I know what it's all about," he or she should be told, "No! you don't get to know the life of God become Man in a single reading, nor in a thousand. Keep reading the Gospels, and you'll find that you always get more out of them; you always get to know him better; he always attracts you more."  
Besides, that Jesus, who is so wonderful, lives. You can talk with him. And there we have prayer (which means conversation with the Friend) as another wonderful means for striking up friendship [101]. Five minutes each day, using your own words, full of faith, aware that he is looking at you, listening to you, understanding and loving you. We need to talk and listen to him in our prayer. And we need to receive and be fed by him in the Eucharist. To receive the Eucharist means to let God himself "work" inside us, communicating his very life to us and strengthening our faith and our love.  
Is it hard to get young persons to see all this? I don't think so. But it will mainly depend on what they see and sense in their own families. The parents may be "practicing" Catholics, they may even be exemplary parishioners and so on ... but if youngsters do not acquire the growing conviction that religion, for their parents, means above all a personal friendship with a Friend with whom they are not yet so friendly, then their ambition to seek that friendship is not likely to be stirred.  
It is so very different if children begin to understand that when their parents pray, they are really talking with God. Again, few religion classes can teach children as much about what the Eucharist should mean as their simply observing their parents staying on for a few minutes' thanksgiving after Holy Communion - and obviously relishing those moments of special intimacy with our Lord.  
A family needs to pray together, though it is wise if the children's part in family prayers is as voluntary as possible. But is it not likely that they would be keener to take part in the Rosary, for example, if they were taught that this devotion is closely connected with the gospel? That it is, in words of Pope Paul VI, a way of contemplating "the mysteries - the deeds - of the life of Christ seen through the Heart of her who was closest to our Lord" (Marialis cultus, 47)?  
2. Loyal to Christ  
In the second place, we have said, there must be loyalty toward Christ. The more friendship there is, the easier it is to be loyal. Nevertheless, it is wise to emphasize that forgiveness has an essential role within friendship: forgiving, on the one hand, which is something that our Lord, who is God, is tireless in doing with us; and asking to be forgiven, which is something that we who are human, and very often offend him, have constantly to do with him.  
A first expression of loyalty, therefore, is repentance immediately after a fault, and, if needed, Confession. This is simply the process by which love is born again. It is necessary, then, to insist on how important it is that children see their parents go to Confession frequently.  
Since there is so much talk today, especially among young people, about freedom, it is good to remind them that freedom means our ability to say Yes or No; that each time we say Yes to something, we say No to other things. What matters, therefore, is not to be able to say Yes to oneself, as if being a Yes-man to one's self were a sign of a well-developed or a well-defended personality. When all is said and done, to say Yes to oneself generally means saying Yes to one's selfishness - which is a sign not of personality but of weakness and self-indulgence. For a true personality, what matters is the ability to say Yes to other people, in all of the noble demands that our life with them involves. What matters above all is to be able to say Yes to God, for that is what love for him means; and to continue saying Yes, even when it is hard, for that is what loyalty to him means.  
It can be so helpful to young persons if they are taught that these are the alternatives involved in any moral problem: being loyal, or being disloyal, to Christ! It helps them so much if they are told that life for all of us is the up-and-down story of how we now choose one alternative, and then perhaps the other. And that salvation means having more ups than downs, canceling out our acts of disloyalty by acts of loyalty.  
3. Proud of Christ  
"You have to learn how to live a Christian life in a pagan atmosphere," I tell young people time and again. It is true because, to all practical intents and purposes, the social and moral atmosphere surrounding us all today is pagan. It is never easy to go against the social grain or cut across current fashions. And a person can find himself strongly tempted to yield, to keep quiet, to hide the fact that he is a Christian, out of fear of what people may say. He may be tempted, in a word, to be ashamed of his faith; which is the same as being ashamed of Christ.  
St. Paul, in another period of paganism, felt this temptation or at least recognized that it could hit his fellow Christians. And so he encouraged them, saying in his usual forceful way, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel!" (Rom 1:6). St. Paul had not lived with Christ during the years of our Lord's life on earth. But he had gotten to know him well through prayer and the contemplation of all the details he had been able to learn from others about Jesus (details that we too can learn in the Gospels). Paul well remembered those words of our Lord, "If anyone is ashamed of me and of my doctrine before this sinful and adulterous generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when he comes" (Mk 8:38). He was ashamed neither of Christ nor of his doctrine. He felt happy and proud to follow him. If we help our young people to get to know Christ, they will easily feel the same healthy and holy pride in following him.  
Let us list a few expressions of this holy pride. A Christian should feel proud of Christ's friendship, proud of Christ's teaching, proud of Christ's example.  
**Proud of Christ's friendship**. This is how the Christian should feel: proud of the friendship that Christ has for him. And proud of the expressions of friendship toward our Lord he himself wants to show. Proud, therefore, of his piety - which simply means the devout fulfillment of his religious practices. For example, he will not be ashamed to go to Mass, or to have others notice that he is trying to follow the Mass well without yielding to distractions. He will not be ashamed to say the Angelus, or to make a visit to the Blessed Sacrament, even when the friends he is with raise their eyebrows. And he will live these expressions of piety without any fear of being accused of "holier-than-thou" attitudes - because he knows he is simply living out what he has good reason to be proud of. Like the son who feels proud of his parents or his brothers and sisters; when he is away from home, studying or working, he is not in the least concerned if his companions are aware that he writes or phones them or buys them presents.  
**Proud of Christ's teaching**. Because it is a teaching that sets people free. "You will know the truth," Jesus said, "and the truth will make you free" (Jn 8:32).  
In a world increasingly dominated by hatred, selfishness, and runaway passions, it should not be difficult (it is not, in my experience) to arouse young people's enthusiasm for the human nobility of Christian living. Let us remind them of these words of St. Josemaría: "We have to act in such a way that those who see us can say: this man is a Christian, because he does not hate, because he is willing to understand, because he is not a fanatic, because he can control his instincts, because he is ready to make sacrifices, because he shows he is a man of peace, because he knows how to love" (Christ is Passing By, no. 122). Let us explain to them that this program is based on a real and constant rebellion - the greatest rebellion, Josemaría used to say, that any person can get involved in, and the only one that is really worth while: the rebellion of each one of us against his or her own selfishness.  
I would like to emphasize this point. If, for example, you speak to them clearly and positively about purity, my experience is that young people have no difficulty in seeing through the pathetic hypocrisy of those who would dismiss all restraint in sexual matters as a sign of a Victorian hangup. They understand that those who take this line, far from being more liberated or mature, are in fact weaker and more enslaved, and above all incapable of really loving. And, again in a phrase of the founder of Opus Dei, they understand that purity is a "joyful affirmation"; that it is a condition of freedom, of grace, of love; and that the person who understands what love is about is happy to face up to the struggle needed for purity.  
In the case of girls this insight can be especially important. Obviously, it is only by doing violence to her own womanly nature that a girl or a woman can throw her inborn and deeply-rooted feminine modesty on the dust-heap. When, in spite of everything, she does so - as quite a number do today - the logical consequence is that men cease to respect her. They may ogle her, but they do not admire her. Their looks express desire; they express anything but respect. After all, what a man who is really a man and not simply a human animal looks for in a woman is something more than mere physical attractions. He looks for delicacy, grace, tenderness, sensitivity, understanding, personality, reserve, and modesty. These are qualities he can admire. If he doesn't find them, his admiration for the woman's physical attractions will degenerate into mere desire, and his attitude toward her as a person, into contempt.  
Is it so hard for a girl to understand that there is a big difference between being looked at and being admired? Or that if, by her way of behaving or dressing, she draws men to desire her in a specific way, she is not making herself respected by them, she is making herself despised? A mother who really loves her daughter should have no difficulty in getting these points across to her. Provided she backs up her words with her own example, a mother should have no difficulty in explaining to her daughter that modesty in a woman is simply the expression of her determination to be treated as a person and not as an object.  
These reflections should help us to appreciate once more the marvel of Christian morality, as we see how it is both a support and a defense of human values. How could anyone not be proud of moral standards that are the very basis for human nobleness itself?  
It is clear that the truth of Christ, which makes us free, does not refer only to the sphere of sexuality. Do we not also feel proud of Christ's doctrine, which makes us know ourselves and helps us to overcome fear as we acknowledge ourselves as sinners? So it helps us avoid falling into the isolation of pride. It makes us humble, open, and understanding with others.  
And we do feel proud of the doctrine of Christ, which teaches us that the world is good - as a means, not as an end in itself. The doctrine sets us on our guard, therefore, against the temptations of all those false philosophies that are forever promising man a hedonist, materialist, or Marxist paradise here on earth. Christ's doctrine, by teaching us that our real and lasting treasure lies in Heaven with him, and by encouraging us to put our hearts there also, helps us precisely to be more detached, less envious and covetous, and so enables us to be more truly concerned for the well-being and material welfare of others.  
No one should outdo the Christian in his concern for other people. This too is part of what his ideal, Christ, teaches him.  
**Proud of Christ's example**. The Christian should feel proud of the way Christ gave himself to others. And he should feel proud too of the ways in which he himself can imitate that example of dedication and service. As he tries to fulfill Christ's New Commandment of mutual love - "by this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn 13:35) - he should remember those other words of our Lord: "The Son of Man has not come to be served, but to serve" (Mt 20:28).  
To serve other people: what a great ideal! And how seldom met today. There are contexts in which the word is used - servants, domestic service - which, to speak frankly, tend to put off many people today. Nevertheless, when all is said and done, it remains an ideal that has a powerful attraction for the young people of our times. That this is true, is borne out by the voluntary youth services that abound today as never before: work-camps, dispensaries, rural schools, and so on.  
The most common and perhaps the most wonderful example of service, for love's sake, is that of mothers in their dedication to the home. If each son and daughter is assigned a family task, it is easy to get them to understand that to fulfill their job well is a way of serving others, a way of loving them. When, despite everything, they get cross at times, because they find their job hard, that is precisely the best opportunity to teach them that, true enough, love at times is difficult, but that these inevitable difficulties need not take away the smile that can always accompany love and service. If parents, in their dedication to their family, smile always (or almost always), they are turning their home into a marvelous school of Christian spirit and idealism.  
**Service as an ideal**. At times, however, one meets Christian mothers who sacrifice themselves unstintingly in their dedication to their families, but who seem incapable of appreciating, and certainly do not encourage, the various ways in which their daughters seek to give outlet to their noble instincts for service. They are anything but enthusiastic if one of their daughters wants to train for nursing. They get scared if another is keen on studying domestic science. They accept a proposal to become a teacher - but, oh so reluctantly! .... Just as well that many girls' instincts in such cases are often healthier than their mothers' prejudices.  
Some professions obviously call more particularly for a spirit of service, and it is important to help young people appreciate this aspect of such a career if they intend to take it up. Medicine no doubt stands out, as perhaps the noblest of all human professions. Nevertheless, we are in a moment when the very nature of medicine is being threatened by anti-life movements (abortion, sterilization, contraception, euthanasia). There is an urgent need for a reevaluation of the true meaning of the medical profession as a profession at the service of life. Doctors can do so much here by taking part in professional orientation courses and so on; they can communicate genuine and noble professional ideals to young people who mean to become doctors or nurses.  
And how about law, as a profession at the service of justice - that primary condition if there are to be trust and peace in society? The ideal of 'giving to each his due' can only be maintained through a generous love for the truth. Few citizens command such well-deserved esteem as the honest lawyer or the just judge.  
Let us turn to military service. In countries where it is obligatory, this may undoubtedly make it more difficult for people to appreciate its noble qualities of service toward one's native land. Yet one could scarcely overemphasize how important it is that a spirit of disinterested service should be maintained and grow in the armed forces.  
And what about public service? What about politics as a service-profession? Politics is perhaps the most practically important profession, and often the least Christianized. By Christian politics, I am not of course referring to leftist or rightist politics, but simply to a political philosophy and political practice of service to the common welfare. Politics is indeed a noble profession when politicians cherish the ideal of service and, if they are in authority, use their authority in order to serve.  
Is this hard to achieve? Yes, it is. Is it utopian or impossible? Why should it be? To think that it can never be achieved would be to show an unjustified lack of trust in the idealism of our young people who will be tomorrow's politicians. It would amount to saying that a power-grabbing spirit - wanting positions of authority simply so as to be one of the top dogs - must necessarily prevail over selflessness, loyalty, and nobility. Why should we think so? We have no right to yield to such a pessimistic view, to such a philosophy of determinism. We should rather firmly believe that, if the love of Christ is kept before our young people's eyes, they will be worthy servants.  
In short, we should go over each of the professions so as to pinpoint and emphasize its aspect of service toward others and toward society. And at the same time we should point out how the Christian who wants to imitate Jesus Christ has more motives than others to turn a generous desire to serve into the real inspiration of his or her professional work.  
**The ideal in study**. Perhaps we might conclude this reflection by referring more specifically to the theme of study. Few adolescents are "book worms" by nature. Most of them find study hard. And since, if they do not study, they will not mature for life or even be able to earn their living, we seem clearly bound to push them to study.  
True. Though perhaps to "push" them is not the best way to put it. The results of pushing generally don't last very long. You can push a car with its engine switched off, and it will move. But once you stop pushing, the car stops too. What you really have to do is to get the engine working, and then the car will go by itself. Pushing can help in this, but not if the ignition is not connected ... Something similar happens with young people's studies. Threats of punishment, the prospect of having to spend the holidays over one's books, the help a tutor can give through private classes ... such things can give them a temporary push. But none of it gets to the heart of the problem. And as soon as the immediate pressure is over, laziness returns, and the boy's or girl's studies begin to drag again. And there they are, grinding along in first gear, way below capacity.  
What matters with young students is not so much to push them from outside as to get them to move themselves from within. The key lies in motivating them. This is what sets them going.  
But I would emphasize that the motivations put before them should be serious and lasting; and if possible, noble. From what I said at the start it should be clear that the promise of rewards or prizes is not a good motivation. Neither is it enough to threaten or encourage them with such ideas as: "If you don't learn to study, you'll never be a man; if you don't study, you'll never get through college, you'll never be able to raise a family." This is not enough. What should move them to study, already from these early years, must be their ideals.  
The main motive to put before them is that of pleasing God. God wants each one of us to fulfill the specific duties of our state in life. The student's job, his God-given job, is to study. When he does so, therefore, he is carrying out God's will. This is a fact he should be consciously aware of. It will help him if he studies with a small crucifix before him, placed on his study table or on the pages of his textbook. He should study out of love, in order to please the God he loves. In this way he can discover that an hour of study, instead of being a sort of martyrdom, or at least a colossal bore, can be an hour of friendship: "an hour of prayer" (The Way, no. 335).  
An apostolic motive should also inspire young persons' studies. They should know that they can offer each study period for others. But it is also important for them to consider that by studying properly today, they are laying the foundation for an important work tomorrow. They are qualifying themselves so that they can become someone on whom God can rely later on: in their university years, when they set up a family, in their professional life, so that their solidly acquired professional prestige, their honesty, and their spirit of service toward others will help bring Christ into the most varied human activities, along with all the noble values and ideals that his presence inspires.  
4. Longing to introduce Christ to others  
Young people formed in this way will not be on the defensive about their Christianity. Proud of Christ and proud of all that he asks of them for their good and the good of mankind, they will want to make him known, to spread faith in him, to share the joy that becoming friends with him and following him bring. In other words, they will do an apostolate. This word does not imply an impertinent interference in the lives of others, or a failure to respect other people's freedom or rights. It simply means stirring them with the example of a cheerful, clean, and generous way of living, and so waking them to the great and beautiful things that can be discovered in life.  
St. Josemaría frequently said that Christians in the world should act with a "superiority complex." This implies no contemptuous attitude toward others. Quite the contrary! It implies a desire to see them open their eyes, look upward, and see the magnalia Dei - God's wonders, which we, despite our defects and unfaithfulness, and by his mercy, know and see.  
I remember the old joke in England about the difference between the Cambridge graduate and the Oxford graduate. The Cambridge man gives the impression of being the owner of the world, while the Oxford man gives the impression of not caring two hoots who owns the world ... I've always felt like adding, in all earnestness, that we Christians should give the impression of knowing who owns the world: my Father - who is God. I know that he is my Father and that I am his child and heir. So many others around me, who are or can be children and heirs of God, do not seem to know it. Let's give them a good awakening!

And other people?  
There is a further question that we might ask about the young Christian who is trying to live out this life of true idealism from his early teens. What should his attitude be toward other people? I could, of course, touch on many things in answer, but I would like to dwell on one point in particular. I would say his attitude toward others should largely be one of surprise. He should be surprised, truly astonished, at the lack of ideals he sees in so many people around him or at the false ideals they at times pursue.

Surprise  
He should be surprised. I think it is worth examining this reaction, this attitude of surprise, because it is a factor of the highest importance both for the good defense of one's own Christian ideals and for their communication to others.  
A sign of the weakness of the faith and ideals of many Christians today is the fact that they show little or no surprise at current events, ideas, or attitudes that are not only unchristian but are not even human. Clearly, this lack of psychological reaction, this absence of an intimate and indignant rejection of the errors or aberrations in question, weakens not only their own defense against such evils, but also their very capacity to convince other persons that such things in fact are evil.  
One of the first bits of advice I got about teaching comes to my mind. I was told that a teacher's simple look of surprise sometimes obtains a more rapid change of conduct in a child than would a reasoned explanation. Put on a look, I was told, of How is it possible a ten-year-old boy can do a thing like that? - and you'll see the results. I liked the idea. But the results were far below expectation, and have taught me to distrust the formula, at least with children of that precise age. My experience is that, no matter how surprised you look, the boy can look back at you, as cool as a cucumber, as if to say, "I wonder just when you will learn that a ten-year-old boy is capable of doing something like that and much more besides." His teacher's face of surprise leaves him absolutely cold. He probably even finds it funny.  
However, I have since concluded that it wasn't the teaching technique which was wrong, but the age level at which it was meant to be applied. The surprised-look reaction, which bounces off the ten or eleven-year-old, can in fact be quite effective with an older person, and especially with adolescents, who, between the ages of fourteen and twenty, are tremendously sensitive to what others think of them and are very scared of making fools of themselves.

Who is making a fool of himself?  
Moreover, applying this specifically to what we are talking about - the apostolate - it is not a question of a stratagem or an affected reaction. The reaction should be real. It is simply a question of not failing to be surprised at attitudes that are in fact surprising.  
Here we have to make up for lost ground, for in some inexplicable way we have let a great deal of the psychological advantage pass to the opposite side. So much so, that many people today are "surprised" if it turns out that one does go to Mass, or has not read the latest best-selling obscenity, or has not seen the latest pornographic film.  
Given this situation, it seems urgent not only to re-stress the sense of sin in these matters, but also to recover the sense of the ridiculous. Otherwise some people are going to keep on thinking, "Of course I know that if I see or read this, I'll be committing a sin, but if I don't see it, I'll be making a fool of myself," whereas the truth is that, if they do see it, they are not only committing a sin but they are also in fact making fools of themselves! Of course, it is more important to convince them that they are committing a sin, but, to begin with, it may be easier to get them to see they are making fools of themselves. For they are. And we should be surprised at it; and show our surprise.  
There are, then, two points to be emphasized here. Our surprise may be the best defense against the possible weakening of our own firmness in principles and conduct. After all, if a person does not react with amazement at the absurdity - at the intellectual poverty and the human degradation - of the postures held by some Christians, he may eventually come to regard them as reasonable or respectable... But our surprise may also prove to be a healthy shock for these inconsistent Christians. It may be a new experience for them, and one needed precisely in order to give a jolt to their dulled minds. If the jolt sets their minds working, they may begin to be aware of the extraordinary degree to which they are being fooled or are fooling themselves.  
It is surprising, really surprising, if a person states that he does not believe in God, or if he maintains, as a reasonable proposition, the idea that the world emerged, spontaneously, from nothing. It is surprising if he states this. But it would be even more surprising if we were to treat his statement as if it were a reasonable and intelligent position, and begin to argue seriously about it. It is not a serious position. It is absurd. Our first natural reaction, therefore, should be to laugh at it. After that (also out of charity), we should try to get him to look at the matter in a more mature fashion. In a word, we should try to get him to think.  
It is surprising if a person who says he is a Catholic does not pray or go to Mass on Sundays; or goes, but obviously under the impression that he is fulfilling a senseless obligation, and without the least awareness that he is receiving a divine gift. It is absurd.  
It is surprising if a person proclaims himself to be more "liberated" because he rejects the need for any type of self-control in sexual matters. It is absurd because he is clearly enslaving himself.  
It is surprising if a person "justifies" his attendance at a notoriously pornographic show by appealing to what certain critics have said about its "artistic" value. To put on airs about the culture or refinement that he has drawn from a show of that nature is simply pathetic and absurd.  
It is surprising when someone defends abortion in the name of humanity or when he suggests that it all boils down to the "right" a woman has over her own body... It is absurd.  
It is surprising if a communist puts himself forward as a defender of freedom or democracy. One has only to think of the "democratic freedoms" lived in China in order to classify him, if not as a hypocrite, at least as a comedian. It is absurd.  
Any Christian with an average formation can easily see what is sinful or mistaken in the examples given, or in other examples along the same lines. But many fail to see how poverty-stricken they themselves are, how hollow, how ridiculous, and how absurd. Christians who are really in contact with Christ, as their ideal and as their Friend, will scarcely fail to notice it. And their reaction will be one of amazement. And that amazement can startle many people out of their sleep.  
I've seen so many cases. The boy whose friend tells him that he hardly practices his religion, and who reacts: "But, is it possible that you don't go to Mass? ... What, you just don't care about receiving Holy Communion? ... But, do you seriously mean you haven't been to Confession for six months? ..." And the look of surprise - which is not put on, which is genuine - shakes his companion. Because normally these friends have some faith left, however anaesthetized it may be. And what can rouse and waken them, at least to begin with, is not so much reasoned argument but a friend's amazement: "But, are you mad"?" And they may well begin to think, "Perhaps he's right. Perhaps I am mad."  
"Have you watched that film"? You're nuts.... Don't you realize that if you go on like that, your life is going to fall to pieces? You're going to become a slave to obsession, don't you see that? And have you thought that you won't have the slightest chance of a happy marriage later on because no decent girl or boy will accept you?" Each of these questions can be a hammer-blow, awakening them, because they know in their hearts that all of it is true.  
And if it's the case of the comfort-loving egoist: "So, you see no need to serve other people? You are quite happy just looking after yourself? What a miserable life!"  
And if it is a Marxist: "I agree with you that we should try to build a more just society. But we won't achieve it by spreading violence and hatred... Besides, are you really satisfied to be a pawn of the State, a lump of matter, no more, in a world where no one has any real worth because no one has any personal destiny? Does such a poor ideal really satisfy you? How pitiful! How absurd!"

Saving idealism from bankruptcy  
Before ending this discussion, let us recall those words of St. Josemaría Escrivá that I quoted at the beginning. "Young people have always had a great capacity for enthusiasm, for big things, for high ideals, for everything that is genuine." For everything that is genuine! Christ is genuine, even though we Christians often are not. Christianity is a genuine ideal, an ideal that fills to overflowing the noblest desires of the human heart. And its genuine nature is bound to stand out more clearly, in all its colossal attractiveness, precisely in a world like ours so filled with false "ideals" - whose falseness is each day becoming harder for people not to see.  
Perhaps in former times, many people did not reach the full truth (the Truth of Christ), or did not accept the true Ideal - which is Christ - because they stopped half-way. They never managed to get beyond partial and exclusively human ideals. And there they remained, in a posture that combined a certain ease (because partial ideals do not generally ask for too great a commitment in too many areas at the same time) with a certain sincerity (because their minds were captivated by that part of the truth which they found in those ideals and which, if one did not look too deeply into the matter, seemed to give the stamp of an all-embracing and genuine ideal). And in this way many men and women - sincere people, no doubt, though not very deep - were idealists. Idealists and enthusiasts of ideals of equality, of liberty, of fraternity, of the independence of their country, of the emancipation of slaves, and so on.  
These ideals were genuine - as far as they went. And their partial authenticity was often enough to capture the hearts of the young. But today authenticity seems everywhere to be on the verge of bankruptcy. The noble names and terms of the great human ideals of the past are bandied about, as much as or more than ever before. But they are being given a content and meaning that is so low, so degraded, even at times so anti-human, that it no longer seems possible for anyone to be taken in, unless he or she wants to be.  
When the "ideals" offered to people are: in the name of love, sex: in the name of freedom, license and selfishness; in the name of the right to a full development of one's own personality, contempt for the standards and rights of others; in the name of independence and personal maturity, the rejection of any type of authority and the consequent incapacity for service; in the name of responsibility or democratic participation, idle and sterile protest; in the name of political or social justice, violence and hatred... When this is what we are offered, what, one may ask, is lacking to have human idealism declared utterly bankrupt?  
It is not we Christians, however, who will declare it bankrupt. We can save it. If young people (and in some degree, all men in their hearts) are looking for genuine ideals, the moment could hardly be more favorable. All the partial human ideals have failed or been emptied of their content. All that is needed now is to expose the falseness or hypocrisy of the libertine, materialist, or communist "ideals." This is the task now facing us Christians. It will be easily done if we have more faith, more daring, and a keener sense of the ridiculous. Then an entire world of young people and older people will have no alternative (nor will they, I feel, want any alternative) but to turn to the only truly genuine ideal, the only full ideal that is neither false nor insufficient, the only ideal capable of appealing to everyone, of enthusing and filling them, of uniting and purifying and elevating them: the ideal which is Christ.

13. The Family and the Permissive Society  
The permissive society turns violent  
Lots of us have the impression that the modern world is succumbing to violence. In the face of so many acts of sheer brutality and terrorism, no doubt we often ask ourselves: how can some people be so irresponsible, unprincipled, and violent?  
The answer, I suggest, lies partly in ourselves. We are all in some way to blame for the growing violence of the world we live in, because we tolerate - or perhaps even seek and approve - a permissive society. The logic is simple. A permissive society means a society which professes no fixed moral principles: anything goes. In theory, there is one restraining principle: conduct should not be anti-social. But, saving this, nothing else is really wrong, anything can be right; it all depends on one's individual outlook. And when young people grow up in a society where they have been taught that there are no absolute and objective moral values, but everything is relative and subjective, they are not likely to put 'collective interests' above their personal desires or whims. When the mass of young people are taught that nothing is sacred, nothing merits absolute respect, it is only logical that many of them end up in fact respecting nothing at all - nothing personal, nothing social: not property, nor law, nor liberty, nor life. Little more is needed to make them criminals or terrorists. And if some go that way, it is the very society they despise, rob and terrorize that has helped turn them into terrorists [102].  
A permissive society creates a climate that fosters violence ... But is this a thesis that can be proved? I think so. After all, permissiveness centres mainly on the question of sex. And it should be obvious to anyone with a minimum of commonsense that sex is an area of human conduct filled with potential for violence. To deny this would leave one unable to account for the phenomenon of rape and other whole chapters of criminal history.  
Contrary to what is suggested by much modern propaganda, sex and love are not the same. Subordinated to love and to its evident procreative function, sex is a noble and God-given reality that finds its proper expression in married love. But sex is man's most unruly and explosive instinct. It does not easily let itself be subordinated to anything. Once the sexual impulse is aroused, it wants immediate satisfaction, and it wants it on its own terms, as an end in itself.  
The paradoxes of man are many. And they are specially intense in the sphere of sex. Sex which can, with an effort, be integrated into man's most noble power of love, can also - if no effort is made - be one of the most brutal and violent expressions of his selfishness [103]. Uncontrolled sex tends to run wild. It is destructive. The first thing it destroys, in its self-seeking, is love, for love and selfishness are mutual enemies. And it can destroy many other things besides.

Abortionism leads to terrorism  
Our permissive societies not only tell people that there is little or no need to control the violence of their sexual impulses, but tend to surround them with constant sexual stimulation. The inevitable result is growing violence.  
The philosophers of permissiveness do not like this talk of there being a violent element in sex, though they are scarcely so naive as to deny it. If pushed they would probably say that, though not against violence in sex, they are against sex that does violence to others, that is, against their will. A permissive society therefore regards rape, for instance, as wrong. But its philosophers would maintain that all other forms of sexual conduct should be considered morally, socially, and legally acceptable; not only whatever an individual chooses to do sexually, in the sphere of his own private thoughts and actions, but also what two or more people - married or single, of the same or opposite sex - consent to do together.  
But a good look at permissiveness will tell us that, however much consent there may be, violence is always done to someone by permissive sex. In the long list of permissive "achievements" in the field of sex or sex-related conduct, it is very arguably true that quite a lot of moral violence is frequently done in the case of extra-marital affairs (violence done to one spouse's right to expect loyalty from the other), and much more so in that of divorce (violence very often done to one of the spouses; and certainly to the children). Do the children normally consent to the divorce? Is tremendous violence not done to their desire that their mother and father should live together and learn to get on? And it is unanswerably true that the most extreme physical violence - the killing of an innocent child - is the essence of abortion. To legalize abortion is to legalize violence. A society that does not fight against abortionists has therefore very soon to fight against terrorists. But it will be a losing battle. For terrorism cannot really be combated with police force. It can only be combated by educating people in moral principles, above all in the fundamental social principle of respect for life.

Violence and pornography  
In any case, leaving aside these questions of the violence to others that a permissive society condones, it is also clear that the person who gives free rein, in any circumstance, to his every sexual desire, does violence to himself, permits violence within himself. And this is the essential reason why a permissive society leads to all sorts of violence. Once people are led to believe - as permissiveness teaches them - that it is perfectly alright to stimulate within oneself, and seek to satisfy, the violent impulses of sex, then it becomes progressively harder, and eventually impossible, to teach or convince them that it is wrong for them to follow other violent impulses: hatred, the desire to rob or kill or seek revenge ... It is useless to tell a person to respect society or to respect others, if at the same time you are telling him that he need not restrain or respect himself.  
Besides, it is not only a matter of commonsense that pornography leads to violence. It is also, by now (sadly enough), a well-documented fact. One would do well to read Chapter Three of the Longford Report on Pornography (1978). Titled "Violence and Pornography," that chapter points out how pornography tends more and more to present the violent - sadistic or masochistic - aspect of sex itself; how it has been consciously used as a means to foster political violence (as in Hitler's Germany) or social instability (marxist tactics in Western countries); and how "hard-core" pornography fosters hatred, aggression and alienation and is clearly a main cause of the growing criminality and violence of our Western societies.

Return to censorship?  
The situation is surely crying out for some form of control. In fact - though this obliges me to use one of the dirtiest words in our language - I would say that it is crying out for some form of censorship! ....  
Censorship?, I can hear some reader cry out incredulously. "But is it possible that anyone nowadays can defend the idea of censorship seriously?" Very seriously. But the censorship I am mainly thinking of is probably not the type the incredulous reader has in mind. It is essentially the self-censorship we referred to in chapter eleven. The following considerations may be helpful.  
Yes, I know that modern man says that he prizes freedom as one of his highest goods; that he regards censorship as one of the greatest traditional enemies of freedom. I know too that it is commonly believed - or at least affirmed - that the progressive abolition of censorship has enabled millions to enjoy a new freedom of which they were formerly deprived.  
Let me then assure the incredulous reader that I, for one, have no desire to deprive the mass of people of their freedom; just the contrary. But I do suggest that, though what we want today is more freedom, it is not what we are getting. What we are getting is sexual anarchy, and what we are being submitted to is sexual exploitation and slavery. Nothing could be farther removed from freedom.

Freedom and exploitation  
'Freedom for all' sounds a noble maxim. But history has shown that freedom for all generally means more and more freedom for the strong, the rich, the clever, or the unscrupulous, and less and less freedom for the rest of mankind. It means freedom for the few and some form of serfdom for the many.  
Absolute freedom in the commercial or industrial spheres was vehemently preached early in the nineteenth century. But practically no one defends it nowadays. The history of nineteenth century liberalism in these fields shows that a few men, if unrestrained by some form of government controls, tend to exploit the masses.  
Why then should we be surprised to find something similar happening when the liberal principle of unrestricted freedom is applied to the sexual sphere? Surely only the very naive could deny that one of the first results of the abolition of censorship has been to turn pornography into big business, and to make multi-millionaires out of the pornographic tycoons? Nor is it hard to see why pornography, as business, is specially big and specially profitable, and why, therefore, immensely rich interests are involved in maintaining the anti-censorship prejudice among the public, and sustaining the fiction of freedom that enables the marketing of pornographic material to prosper.  
If one can stimulate and then exploit an artificial appetite like the taste for tobacco, it should obviously be much easier to exploit - through stimulation - a natural and very strong appetite like the sex appetite.  
The anti-tobacco campaign, on the grounds that smoking is harmful to one's health, has been extraordinarily successful over the past forty years. Perhaps this success was facilitated by the fact that young people have always had a potential sales resistance in regard to cigarettes, in that they generally did not enjoy their first experience of smoking. Therefore, the tobacco manufacturers needed to create and propagate other motives. In their hey-day it wasn't that difficult. By means of constant and direct advertising, a social atmosphere was created in which to smoke gave a he-man image, was considered "mod", or "with it".  
Times have changed. Cigarette-smoking is out - as a result of a civic-minded concern for its harmful effects; pornography is in [103]; and, whatever about its being civic-minded, it is certainly not politically correct to raise the question of its possible harmful or exploitative effects.  
One thing is certain - that the porn industry is a much bigger money spinner than the tobacco industry. Sales resistance tends to be low, and so the pornographer has a potentially easier public - in the sense that pornography is attractive to people's animal instincts. At the same time, however, it is repellent not only to their religious instinct, but to their conscience and, especially in the case of girls and women, to their sense of modesty. These residual forces which make for sales resistance have therefore to be overcome. And this is done by creating a social climate where sexual license is called freedom, and sexual restraint is condemned as old-fashioned, Victorian, unnatural, inhibiting, and so on. The advertising here is indirect. But it is a veritable barrage. And the pornographers' "advertisers" - perhaps unwitting, perhaps unpaid - abound among artists, script-writers, philosophers, psychologists, politicians ...

The slave market  
Another point is that the seller's ideal, in any business, is the regular customer, the habituated consumer. The tobacco market was so sure and so profitable, because it was made for captive buyers. The same could be applied to drink. When the market is drugs or sex, one can even speak of enslaved buyers. The exploitation of slaves - especially when people pay to be slaves - is an infallible way to make an unscrupulous fortune. And all in the name of liberty! The exploitation is all the more obvious when one recalls that commercialized sex is for buyers who are "dupes". It is a fraud. It fascinates; it promises much, it gives little - a satisfaction that leaves the consumer dissatisfied, and yet wanting more.  
In the liberal industrial society of the nineteenth century the common people had little power to resist the exploitation of their lives, even if they wished to. They either worked or starved. Millions today are objects of an exploitation which does not (at least normally) reduce them to living in slums and hovels, which consists not in their material oppression but in their spiritual and human degradation. It is an infinitely worse exploitation. Nevertheless, comparing today's exploitation with that of the nineteenth century, it is evident that men in today's liberal permissive society can resist being exploited, if they wish. The trouble is that many apparently do not wish ...  
At the beginning of laissez-faire capitalism, government policy was one of non-intervention. Under an awakening public conscience and growing public pressure governments were gradually obliged to live up to their responsibilities to intervene and prevent the exploitation of the weak. There seems to be little public sensitivity today about sexual exploitation and sexual degradation, and there is therefore little public pressure on governments to prevent them. It is evident that, until the public wakes up, nothing effective will be done to remedy the situation.  
But, it may be objected, surely the public, or a sizeable section of it, is aware of the corrupting effect of pornography? Yes, there are "concerned" people around; but so many of them seem to hold a very selective awareness in this matter and a very selective approach to it.  
Concern about a pornography problem? Ok; but in what sense? Time and again, in one country after another, investigation committees and work parties come up with proposals which, if one hesitates to brand them as insincere, can only be described as incredibly superficial. The proposals, in a nut-shell, come down to this: "Censorship, for children? Of course! Censorship, for grown-ups? Absolutely not!"  
On the one hand, there are pressing appeals for effective measures to permit our young people to live in an atmosphere free from the corruption caused by pornography. On the other hand, there are indignant rejections of any measure designed to cleanse from the same corruption the atmosphere in which adults move.  
There is agreement, on the one hand, that pornography is a threat to the freedom of young people, and a danger to their normal psychic and emotional development. There is equal agreement on the other, that censorship is a threat to the freedom of adults, and an insult to their maturity.

Maturity and corruptibility  
I don't think it is an exaggeration to say that here we are touching on a subject which is one of the fastest growing areas of lying and insincerity in our modern world. Are we adults all that different from young people? Are we seriously suggesting that what can corrupt a youth aged sixteen cannot possibly corrupt an adult aged twenty-six or fifty-six? As if the eighteen or twenty-one watershed, which gives a certain presumption of maturity, can warrant an equal presumption of incorruptibility!  
It seems incredible that this double-standard posture can be seriously maintained by anyone.. To begin with, one is immediately struck by the practical impossibility of building up any useful result from such contradictory foundations. The "freedoms" which grown-ups claim for themselves must necessarily render the controls for young people ineffective. After all, young people and grown-ups do not move in two totally different worlds nor are their "atmospheres" so easily separated in practice.  
But what is much harder to understand is the concept of man or society on which the proposals are presumably based. If they are based on anything, it would seem to be on one or other of two suppositions:  
(1) that at a certain age or level of maturity, one is no longer in danger of being affected or corrupted by pornography; or  
(2) that at a certain age, it is no one else's business if one wishes to corrupt oneself.  
Let us consider each of these suppositions.

Intelligent? sincere? normal?  
It seems possible to adopt the first attitude - that immunization from pornography comes with the years - only as a result of having switched off one's mind. In such cases, therefore, the only remedy likely to be effective is some form of shock therapy, to get people to think. Since one of the principles often enunciated (though not always practiced) in the permissive society is that it is presumptuous to judge others, my "therapy", in dealing with the cases we are considering, is not to judge, but to try to get each one to judge himself or herself. I should add that occasions have not been lacking to practice the therapy with young people no less than with grown-ups. This also, unfortunately, is logical enough. When adults act and speak as if their "maturity" had somehow immunized them from any degrading effects of pornography, young people (who, for good or bad, tend to imitate their elders) quickly take up the same line, and are only too anxious to affirm that they too are mature and equally immunized. But let us take a specific case and the application of the therapy.  
A fifteen or seventeen year-old boy or girl comes to me and says, "I have read or seen such-and-such [some novel or movie well known to be pornographic], and really I didn't find anything so special or disturbing in it. It didn't affect me ..." My stock way of answering this pseudo-maturity is more or less as follows.  
"Well, of course I can't judge you. You have to judge yourself. But what I can say is that anyone who has seen that film or read that book and says he hasn't been affected by it, cannot be three things at the same time. He can't be intelligent, sincere and normal, all at once. He can be two of these things, or possess two of these qualities, but not the three together". And I explain: "If you, who say you have been left unmoved by this work, are normal and sincere - that is, if you are a normally constituted person as far as sex goes, and at the same time you really think you are telling me the truth - then you are not intelligent, you are not deep, you don't really know yourself. For this work affects all normal people. Therefore it has affected you, without your realizing it ..."  
"Of course this may not be the case. There is a second possibility: that you are normal and intelligent; in other words, you have normal sexual reactions and you know yourself. But in that case, you are not being sincere. Of course that work has affected you, and you know it. But you are not telling me the truth" ...  
"But that, of course, is a possibility you must judge. Far be it from me to make any judgment. You know yourself. Because, after all, there is a third possibility: that you are sincere and intelligent; that you indeed know yourself and are indeed telling me the truth - in other words, that work has really not affected you ... But then, you are ... Well, I leave the conclusion up to you ..."  
I've had more than one indignant reaction; "Hey, I'm not that". To which I reply: "I didn't say you were. I'm only pointing out alternatives. It's you who have to apply them".

Pseudo-maturity  
But are these alternatives valid only for teenagers? Are adults too not capable of a pseudo-maturity? How switched off has the brain got to get before one suggests that a person can be corrupted at sixteeen and not at thirty-six? If a person is in fact corrupt at sixteeen, he will presumably grow into a corrupt adult. And then the problem will be to un-corrupt him. Or are there no corrupt - or corruptible - adults?  
The alternatives - sincere, intelligent, normal - that apply at sixteen apply equally at thirty-six or at fifty. If therefore one meets whole masses of persons nowadays who claim to be so mature that pornography no longer affects them, what is one to think? Is one to assume that such a lack of ordinary sexual awareness is really so widespread? But then, one is driven to the conclusion that many "mature" people today are either dreadfully unthinking or else unthinkingly insincere. My own guess is that they are probably a mixture of both; that is why I would like to say that the lines that follow, though they may hit hard, are not meant to be negative. For they are written in an attempt to jerk unthinking people into thought, in the conviction that if people really do begin to think, they will discover the insincerity of their own position - and begin to be sincere.

Turning sin into virtue  
Today's "adult world", which prides itself on being "liberated" and thanks God (or perhaps just itself) for not being like all former generations of mankind, is guilty not only of Pharisaism much more repellent than that of the Pharisee of the Gospel (see Lk 18:9), but also of hypocrisy much worse than the Victorian hypocrisy it professes particularly to despise. The Victorians - so at least we are told - did wrong and pretended they did not do it. Our modern permissivist does wrong and says it is right. The Victorian sinned and, hiding it, wished himself to be regarded as virtuous. The modern permissivist sins and, proclaiming his sin, wishes it to be regarded as virtue. The Victorian at least knew what sin was, though - perhaps - he did little to avoid it. The modern permissivist proclaims there is no such thing as sin and thus he has nothing to avoid or repent of. He presents himself as sinless. He is the self-proclaimed saint.  
If there is such a generation gap today, if young people have little respect for their elders, it is largely because the younger generation sense the hypocrisy, or at least the falseness, of this all-too-common adult attitude towards the question of censorship: "Censorship for young people; of course. Censorship for us? Absurd! They are young; we must not let them be corrupted. We are mature, and incorruptible". Small wonder that young people have little more than contempt for the defenders of such a double standard of morality.

The right to corrupt oneself?  
As we suggested earlier, the double standard may be based on a slightly different supposition: not that adults are incorruptible, but that, if they want to corrupt themselves, that is their personal business, and no one else - no private individual and no public authority - has a right to interfere.  
This at least is not a moralizing position. Its exponents have no interest in morality. Their motto is freedom. "We want freedom. We claim freedom: freedom to do what we like. Now that we have it, let no one try to take it from us".  
Two comments could be made about this position. One is about the use of the word "freedom". I do not think these people should be allowed to get away with claiming they have found a new freedom. They have not. They have found an old slavery. A sex-addict is no more free than is a drug-addict or an alcoholic. If he chooses to go the way of addiction, that is his choice. But let him not say it is the way of freedom. A man is free not when he is not ruled by external laws, but when he rules himself; when he is master of himself. And these people do not rule themselves. They are ruled by their passions. And the slavery that comes from within is worse than any slavery imposed from outside [105].  
The second comment is to question the supposed "right" a person has to corrupt himself if he wants to. A person will certainly do it, if he wants to; just as a person will rob or murder - or commit suicide - if he wants to. But does he have a right to do these things? Most certainly not. We have the rights which God has given us, no more. We have the power to contravene his will. But we have not the right to do so [106].  
Besides, rights cannot exist without duties. A person's right to life means that everyone else has a duty to respect his life. And he, theirs. I have the right that my neighbour respects my property and my person. But I also have the right that he respects himself. No one has a right to defile the street. No one has the right to degrade the world. No one has the right to degrade himself. We are not disconnected pieces in a disconnected world. What each of us does or is or lets himself become has an effect - for good or bad -on those around him. That is why to degrade oneself is in some way to offend the rest of humanity, just as it is, more importantly, to offend God.

Turning people into objects  
Sex is a divine gift, a sacred function by which human love is, in marriage, given a unique expression of union that associates it with God's creativity. Pornography involves an essential degradation of this sacred reality of sex. For pornography tends to arouse sex for sex's sake, and not sex for the sake of open-to-life conjugal love. That is to degrade its meaning and function, reducing it to the level of animal instinct whose one purpose is to seek immediate sensual satisfaction. And when people give free rein to their animal instincts, they become in fact more and more like animals, and less and less able to respect one another as persons.  
On an even broader plane than the one we have been considering, it is true that a person not in control of his appetites or instincts cannot relate to others in a truly human fashion, for his uncontrolled impulses prevent him from respecting them. He will use or abuse others as objects; he will not respect them as persons. The capitalist, dominated by greed, will exploit his workers, though he will no doubt rationalize his conduct. The terrorist, dominated by exalted nationalism, by blind hatred or by a desire for revenge, will kidnap, torture or murder innocent victims. The pornographer or, more specifically, the pornographer's client - the person dominated and obsessed by sex - will equally exploit others if he can; for other people interest him only insofar as they can serve his obsessive appetite. In others he doesn't see persons, he sees only objects - to be desired, to be used, to be abused, to be discarded. Respect for others becomes meaningless to his befogged mind and impossible to his weakened will and ever more selfish nature.

The permissive woman  
The permissive society makes for selfish people, and selfish people tend not to trust one another. One of the sad - though not surprising - characteristics of our permissive societies is the growing atmosphere of mistrust, especially between the sexes. Men and women, boys and girls, tend to trust each other less and less. It is logical; degraded people do not trust one another.  
The permissive man degrades himself through indulging his sensuality. The permissive woman may do likewise. More often her motive is simply vanity; or else greed. In any case it is equally selfish, and no less degrading.  
Greed is assuredly the main motive of some women who let themselves be paraded as sex objects, for presumably they require to be paid - perhaps substantially - to consent to being photographed for a particular type of magazine, or to take part in certain films or shows. More curious, also because more frequent, is the case of other women - women, moreover, who probably regard themselves as "respectable" - who actually pay (and at times substantially) to parade themselves as sex objects. It is simple feminine vanity that moves them, no more. But at times feminine vanity is just as bad, just as selfish, and just as degrading, as masculine sensuality. The vanity of many women today has so enslaved them to fashion that, by the clothes they wear or their way of behaving, they seem to be inviting men - they almost seem bent on obliging them - to treat them as objects. Their vanity, just as much as the pin-up's cupidity, seeks to exact its payment from men's sensuality.  
While on this subject we could well repeat what we said earlier on modesty - that apparently forgotten or despised feminine virtue of yesteryear. Modesty - in a woman's way of dressing or acting - is simply an expression of her determination to be treated as a person by men; and her refusal to be dragged down to the level of an object.

Children and their parents' loyalty  
I am aware, of course, that some people today will not listen to these arguments. The reason is simple: they will not listen to their own conscience. A person's conscience - if he is prepared to listen to it - tells him clearly enough when he is degrading himself or degrading others.  
Some people, therefore, are indifferent to all arguments. I am not really writing for them. I would rather now write particularly for parents, for I am sure that, whatever their formation, they are not indifferent at least to their own children. And yet there is a grave danger today that, if they do not stop to think and take a sincere look at things, some parents may be guilty of betraying the very children they love.  
Parents who allow themselves permissive liberties are in fact guilty of such a betrayal. I am not referring to the obvious and extreme betrayal of the father or mother who has an affair with someone else or who gets a divorce. I am thinking of the much more frequent betrayal of the parents who practice the double morality we have referred to earlier. "You children cannot see or read this; we can".  
As I have pointed out, children have a right to their parents' loyalty; in this matter they have a right to their parents' sincerity, self-restraint, and example. The father or mother who reads or attends a pornographic work, not only offends God and degrades himself or herself, but violates their children's right to have parents they can look up to.  
This judgment is consistent with our earlier discussion of the need for self-censorship. The practical moral point here is that each one needs to be his own censor: to have the clarity of mind to realize what works can deform or degrade him, and the sincerity and strength of will to avoid them.  
If parents see that the public authorities are doing little to combat the moral contamination of the atmosphere their children have to breathe and grow in, then it is up to them - the parents - to do more. They cannot be afraid to exercise authority with their children and to make demands of them. But these demands have little chance of being listened to (and none whatsoever of being respected) if the parents are not making at least equally strong demands on themselves. Let us be sincere. If parents really love their children, and want therefore to protect them from the pernicious effects of pornography, the only effective (and the only honest) argument is: "To see or read such a show or work would mean offending God and degrading oneself. Therefore we cannot let you see it, just as we cannot - and will not - let ourselves see or read it either".

What am I prepared to eat?  
Self-censorship is simply one expression of self-control, and self-control is essential for individual and social freedom [107]. No one would suggest that self-control is always easy. But it is made a lot easier if one switches on one's mind and exercises a bit of common sense.  
Let us suppose I go to a supermarket with the intention of buying food and something to drink. Let us suppose too that there is a series of foodstuffs and beverages on offer, which look very appetizing and smell very nice, but which I have good reason to know contain poison... What do I do? - I buy something else! Thank God there are plenty of other things to choose from that also taste quite good and are in fact wholesome.  
And if the situation developed where most of the food stuffs on display were poisoned? I'd still not buy them. It would mean having to shop round a bit more, but in the end I'm sure I'd find some edible food. And if the moment were to come when practically everything seemed nice-looking but poisoned? ... Well, I guess I'd just have to grow my own food! And perhaps look around for a few other sensible citizens ready to join in a wholesome-food-producing cooperative.  
What if some (or many) of my fellow citizens didn't seem to believe that the food was poisoned, and ate it? What if they didn't seem to take notice of the subsequent symptoms of food-poisoning (though the symptoms could in fact be easily seen by anyone taking a proper look)? ... I still would not eat ... And if they told me not to be old-fashioned, if they taunted me with being hidebound by Victorian prejudices, if they insisted that my reluctance to eat betrayed a lack of maturity, or a non-liberated personality? ... I still don't think I'd let myself be moved. I trust that my fear of killing myself would prove stronger than my fear of public opinion, especially of such a stupid public opinion. What if the insistence came from friendlier quarters: "Come on, old chap. Don't be such a stick-in-the-mud. Enjoy the fun. It's great stuff, and it tastes so good"? I'd probably answer: "I don't question its attraction. I don't even question its taste (though I do wonder about the after-taste). I simply say it is poison". (And I'd remember that the most dangerous poisons are those which look good and taste good).  
What if a particular friend urged me to share in the goodies he had purchased and was consuming? Frankly if I saw a friend (or anyone I cared for, however slightly) drinking a poisoned Coca-cola or a Scotch-on-the-rocks laced with arsenic, and couldn't manage to persuade him it was poisoned, not only would I refuse to partake, but ... well, I'm inclined to think that, reasoned argument having failed, what I would do in all friendship is to knock the glass out of his hand and break it. And if he protested, "What the so-and-so do you think you are doing? That was my drink!", I'd reply, "I've done you a favor. You were poisoning yourself". And if I did not act so - out of respect for other people's freedom - I think I'd be a very poor friend. God preserve us from liberal friends whose principles make them stand by indifferently while they watch us commit unwitting suicide.

Pornography and poison  
One scarcely needs to spell out the application of the parable. Shakespeare did not actually say that "all the world's a supermarket", though he might well be tempted to do so if he were alive today. And he would probably be capable of adding a few choice comments at seeing that whole sections of the supermarket are being filled with pornography: theater, novels, films, television, entertainment in general, advertising ...  
What is one to do when offered such tempting goods of such doubtful quality? What is one to do? Think. Is thinking all that hard?  
I am offered pornography. So what? Even if my supernatural sense did not tell me that to buy, read, see, or advertise it is an offence against God and destroys the divine life of grace in my soul, my common sense should tell me that it is poison to my natural life, that it threatens to murder all my human possibilities of happiness; obsessing me, depriving me of the freedom to love, making it more and more difficult for me have a respectful relation with any person of the opposite sex or, if that is my calling, to bring a noble and tender and lasting love to marriage.  
Because pornography is poison, I avoid it. If this means having to avoid certain shows, programs, novels or magazines, so what? There are still plenty of other unpolluted works around which I can enjoy. And if someone were to tell me not to be a Victorian, I'd tell him or her not to be a fool. I do not consider myself a Victorian, just a normal person with an ounce of common sense. But in any case, it is better to be a live Victorian than a dead fool.  
And if someone shows me a pornographic magazine, I tear it up. "What the blazes have you done? That was my magazine!" - "That was your poison. I've done you a favour. If you are bent on committing suicide, please go and do it privately and don't try to involve others". It's a peculiar rule of life; but, whether or not the number of the foolish is limitless, some people do in fact seem to believe that foolishness is made less if we can all be fools together: that poison won't prove quite so lethal if we can get everyone to take it. They seem to forget that history has seen whole cities destroyed by plague because no one woke up to the fact that it was plague until too late. More people are being destroyed by the pornographic plague of today than were ever killed by the bubonic of yesteryear.

The half-poisoned cake  
To say, "No, I refuse to see it or read it", when one knows or suspects that the work in question is offensive to God and degrading to man: that is self-control, that is self-censorship. To get up and walk openly out of a show when, contrary to one's expectations, it turns out to be degrading: that is self-control and self-censorship.  
Perhaps we could add a word about the work that one has reason to believe is a first-class production in other respects (plot, acting, camera work, etc.), but has its sprinkling of pornographic scenes, the quite unnecessary poisoned icing-sugar on top or filling inside. What to do?  
Let us go back to the supermarket, because our food shopping can once more help us solve the case. There before me on the counter is an absolutely fabulously looking cake; and perhaps the management is even inviting me to try it, to see how good it tastes. But it is the same story: I am morally certain it is poisoned, at least in parts. Ergo? I do not eat! No; not even if it were gratis! I don't see any compensation in being poisoned free of charge ... (though I do see that what is utterly absurd is to pay to be poisoned, however much this may in fact be what so many people do today).  
Now things could be different if the poisoned portions were quite localized and if someone (someone I could trust) assured me that they had all been cut out of the cake, and that what was left was in fact perfectly good eating, absolutely uncontaminated, a gourmets delight ... In such a case, presented with a thoroughly expurgated cake, I would probably have no hesitation in eating it. The only question is: who is going to do the expurgating for me? I myself? Frankly, I'm not sure that I trust myself. After all, one would have to detect in some way the exact location of the poisoned sections. This obviously requires a palate sensitive to poison (to nice-tasting poison). It especially requires an ability to spot when one is passing from harmless eating to poisoned eating, and this, I suppose, must inevitably involve chewing some slight distance into the poisoned sections. That's the moment when I think I'm capable of fooling myself, and with a "Oh, it can't be that bad, and it does taste good ...", carrying on and swallowing the whole piece; and so having to pay the whole price afterwards.

Nothing to lose?  
The fact is, I repeat, that I'm not sure how far I can trust myself. Cleaning up a poisoned cake really requires a very sensitive palate in order to know where to stop, coupled with a very strong will in order to be able to do so; or else - perhaps - it simply requires a total immunity to poison. I certainly don't have this latter immunity. And though I think I have the required sensitivity of palate, I cannot guarantee the strength of my will. So, all told, if there has to be cake-expurgation, I'd prefer to have the expurgating done by someone else. (Though I will add, as a general and rather annoyed reflection, that I cannot help feeling life would be a lot simpler if the cake producers would be more careful about the extraordinary amount of poison that seems of late to be creeping into their cake-mixtures).  
This is the way I feel about those best-selling films or novels, with their pornographic plums and sugar-icing, those unnecessary scenes thrown in, from the producer's pure bounty, as "free" extras. If I can't find someone else to do (or, really, to undo) the dirty work for me (Oh shades of that old and elephant-hided benefactor, the public censor!), then I'm afraid I'll just eat elsewhere.  
I'm sorry, friends. But if mistrusting oneself or being afraid of unnecessary danger is a sign of immaturity and unliberatedness, well, put me down as decidedly immature and hopelessly unliberated. My only consolation will have to be that here at least I am, still alive.  
James Baldwin, the American writer, speaks somewhere of the danger to society of the presence in it of people who "have nothing to lose". I feel I have everything to lose; or, with God's help, everything to gain. But in order not to lose one's freedom, or one's soul, it is essential to realize that one can lose it, and to be able to recognize and avoid those things capable of depriving one of it. In 1965, on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Battle of Britain, someone asked Ginger Lacy, the RAF's No. 1 Ace of the dog-fights in 1940, how had he survived and what qualities a fighter pilot needs to survive. His answer was crisp and clear: "I survived because I was just bloody lucky. Luck is the main quality a fighter pilot has to have. You must also be able to get good and healthily scared, otherwise you just get yourself killed. I knew some fellows who weren't frightened, and they have been dead for twenty five years".  
Self-censorship is just part of self-control. And self-control and self-vigilance are essential if one wants to survive. If there are many people today who don't exercise self-control, is it because they think there are no dangers? Is it because they don't want to survive? Is it because they think they have nothing to lose? - or nothing to gain? There is a last question that suggests itself about those who never scan the skies, who never dream of danger, who disbelieve in the poison they have been taking for years: Are they alive? Or are they dead? But that is a question that only God (and, perhaps, they themselves) can answer. Whom did the inspired writer have in mind when he wrote: "I know your works; you have the name of being alive, and you are dead ... Remember then what you have received and heard; keep that, and repent. If you will not awake, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come upon you" (Rev 3:1-3).

Parents' hearts  
Not to be scared about one's own survival, how crazy! Not to be scared about one's children survival; how thoughtless, or how criminal and inhuman! And that brings us back to the terrible spectacle of so many parents nowadays who seem to contemplate, in all indifference, the exploitation and destruction of their children's lives, and who at times even contribute to their destruction by their own self-deception, by their practice of "double-standard" morality, by their selfishness and weakness in not denying themselves what they should not want their children to read or see.  
Has the love of such parents for their children completely died? I do not think so. I think it has simply gone (or been put) to sleep. It can therefore be awakened. But when will that awakening come?  
In this context, there often comes to my mind a phrase in which St Luke describes the future mission of John the Baptist as Precursor of Christ. He says he will "turn the hearts of parents towards their children" (Lk 1:17). Could it not be that this is the problem today: that parents do not love their children enough; that their hearts are not sufficiently turned toward them? A conversion of their parents' hearts is what the world's young people need.  
If parents really turn their hearts towards their children, they will have no trouble in seeing how they should try to be a model for them. They will see the need to be sincere and demanding with themselves, practicing self-control, refusing to let themselves see or read many things that attract them, in the conviction that this fortitude of theirs is a source of strength for their children, and that they are giving them an example of real human maturity and of Christian living - an example that they can respect and imitate.  
If parents really turn their hearts towards their children, they will no longer remain blind to the criminal exploitation of which they are being made the main object. And with the awakening of parental love, there will come an arousal of public opinion, an upsurge of moral indignation and - at last - a genuine, popular, massive pressure on the public authorities to remedy the abuses of the present situation.

The abuses of censorship?  
State control is not enough to stop the moral decay of our world. Only self-control can to do that. But State control is also necessary, for there will always be some people who are not prepared to exercise self-control. There will always be some unscrupulous persons who are bent on making a name or a fortune for themselves, through sexual exploitation. And these people need to be restrained.  
If, as we indicated, there is a public right to clean streets and unpolluted air, and a corresponding obligation on the part of the public authorities to restrain those who cause physical contamination, there are equal rights and duties in regard to moral contamination  
So, unless one wishes to be a party to the exploitation of the young (and the not-so-young) and the general corruption of society, there is no alternative but to support and demand some form of responsible public censorship. We will be more convinced and more convincing in our demands if we learn to see through the smoke-screen of anti-censorship propaganda so effectively raised today.  
Censorship, it is commonly said, is subject to manipulation, political control, abuse ... No doubt. But - as we have amply suggested - so is freedom. I may agree with the person who cries "Freedom is better than censorship", provided he agrees with me that the abuses of freedom are worse than the abuses of censorship. And the abuses of freedom are rampant and visible on all sides today, and do incalculable damage (in their personalities and humanity) to millions, while the abuses of censorship are infinitely less frequent and, above all, affect or damage (primarily in their pocket-books) very few.  
Besides, I just don't accept the contrast implied in the position: "Freedom - even if it involves some pornography - is better than censorship". Pornography is censorship, in as much as it means consciously and deliberately silencing and suppressing other more human, more important, and more noble aspects of sex than the merely animal and physical. A government therefore that does not face up to its responsibility to censor pornography is in fact censoring freedom, is threatening and limiting people's freedom to be masters of self, to avoid having an obsessed and inflamed imagination, to be able to respect themselves and others, to love and to be happy.

Governmental incompetence  
Some present-day governments appear to have absolutely renounced their duty to regulate these matters. Their irresponsibility would, in certain cases, seem to be based on an ignorance of human nature, such as to render them totally unfit and incompetent to govern.  
What is one to make of the situation in certain countries where the government launches a massive campaign against cigarette smoking, at the same time as it legalizes abortion and passes ever more permissive sex laws? Does it not understand that a person's moral health - the very fibre of his character - will be much more certainly undermined by pornography than the health of his body can ever be by smoking?  
It is true that at times the same authorities clap a sort of super-tax on pornographic films and shows. But, one asks: is this so called "economic censure" seriously meant to be a restraining measure? Is it likely to stop the pornographic performances, or will it mean only that, to cover the surtax, the public will be required to pay more to see these shows? What sort of government concern does this reveal? It is possible that we are reaching an acme of political irony: governments, after all, have hitherto generally claimed the right to send people to prison for not paying their taxes. Could it be that they are now going to send them to prison - to moral enslavement - for paying them !

Sex, a private matter?  
Western governments may be sincere in their concern about their citizen's welfare. The trouble is that they just don't seem to know what this welfare involves and demands. And surely nothing more disastrous can happen to a society than that the power to govern should be held by those who do not know what the object of government is.  
The object of government is indeed to procure the public welfare or common good. But the common good is not achieved simply because the Gross National Product or the per-capita income is growing; or because people enjoy good public health or postal services. The common good is being achieved when a government creates and defends conditions where man can live as man, and this means protecting whatever is favorable to human and personal dignity, and restraining those who would degrade or exploit others (whether economically, or - more importantly - morally).  
Government responsibility has become restricted to the administration of things, and no longer considers the development of persons. Politicians nowadays are practically all economic philosophers. They have an economic idea of man; they have no human idea of economics. And so they have no real human-centered idea of the societies they have to govern.  
Only a government without a true philosophy of man could yield to the apparently simple thesis (pushed by ingenuous or not-so-ingenuous liberals) that sex is a private matter, which governments and laws have no right to regulate ...  
The thesis is apparently simple. But it is also demonstrably false. For sex, as we have seen, is an area of human weakness - open therefore to unscrupulous exploitation - just as, when uncontrolled and especially when exploited, it is paradoxically a force making for violence and for the destruction of social peace. There are indeed private aspects to sex; but uncontrolled or exploited sex is not one of them.

14. Love, Family, and Society  
Western society is going pathological; in many respects it is already quite sick. It is not I who make this drastic diagnosis, but Pope John Paul II. In his Letter to Families of 1994, he did not hesitate to say: "our society... from various points of view, is a society which is sick, and is creating profound distortions in man" (no. 20). Is such a diagnosis exaggerated? I do not think so. Is it pessimistic? Again, I would say No, for it is given by a doctor firmly convinced that the patient is made for good health and has the ability to recover, and who himself knows and dispenses the right medicine to bring about the cure.  
It is a stringent and disturbing diagnosis, certainly, but it is also encouraging. It says that something is wrong, seriously wrong; but shows how it can be put right. The Pope's optimism comes from his conviction and repeated insistence that man is meant for a "civilization of love" (no. 13), while his diagnosis derives from the fact that our western civilization seems to be one not of love but rather, as he puts it, "a civilization of production and of use, a civilization of 'things' and not of 'persons', a civilization in which persons are used in the same way as things are used" [108].  
The consequences of a civilization of use, of a consumer-society, are clear. When everything (which includes everyone) becomes an object of use, once the object is no longer found to be useful, the practical thing is to discard it and if it won't go away, to find ways of getting rid of it. A civilization of use can lead to a "civilization of dumping", of elimination of all that is considered unwanted (an unborn child, for instance). And when the unwanted thing or person cannot be easily eliminated, it can lead to a "civilization" of hatred [109].  
It is love in particular which is in a critical state of pathology today. Not God's love - for it is never in crisis - , but our love, which has to be the very dynamism of our being and yet can be choked out of us and killed by self-seeking. In a sense, the West is in danger of death through heart-failure: love-failure. This is the sickness gripping Western societies, because true human health can only be present in the person who is able to love; and we are forgetting how to love. We must say it once again: there is the only really important thing in life - to learn to love.  
The Bible puts before us, in all their starkness, the ultimate choices. "I have set before you good and evil... life and death; therefore choose" (Dt 30:19-20). This is the marvel and the burden of our existence, which appears both exciting and fearful, constantly marked by alternatives and choices. Perhaps as one gets older the possibilities may seem to grow less in number, though certainly not less in importance. In the end, they are reduced to just two: Heaven or Hell. These are the definitive alternatives, eternal love or eternal hatred. When all is said and done, life is nothing else than a preparation for those ultimate possibilities: to love or to be no longer able to love, to give or to be no longer able to give, to open one's self out towards others or to remain shrunk within self and closed off from everyone and everything else.  
Practical selfishness and an impoverished understanding of life have always been the "normal" obstacles to love, arising within us and between us. Nevertheless, despite these obstacles, love has always found many natural supports - settings, environments, institutions - for its development. The new pathology we are faced with in our society is that these natural institutions themselves, of which marriage and family life are the chief, are ailing and in danger of dying or of being put to death.  
Let us go back to the start of Creation. In calling man into existence, God's plan was that he should be conceived in love and grow in love; that his experience of life should be matured in a particular school of love, which is the family, constituted by the marital union of man and woman. Through marriage and the family God wishes to send love, and with it goodness, into the world. Wherever love is made present, good acquires that strength of God which conquers the world. God instituted the family to be the first place - the normal "locus" - where love is naturally learned and from which it can spread out to others. It against on this background that John Paul II wrote his Letter to Families. His particular concern is that the very notion and reality of the family are being disfigured or lost today. In consequence of man's lack of self-knowledge [110], "the family too remains an unknown reality" (19). He wishes to present the "truth about the family" (no. 18); and asks Christians to understand and echo it.  
Family quality and family experience are vital if we are to have healthy individuals and a healthy society where, despite the presence of evil, good is even more strongly present. Whether life for each individual and for society turns out to be good or bad, positive or negative, rich in love or dominated by the experience of selfishness, depends fundamentally on the family. In his Letter, the Pope teaches: "the family is placed at the centre of the great struggle between good and evil, between life and death, between love and all that is opposed to love. To the family is entrusted the task of striving, first and foremost, to unleash the forces of good... Every family unit needs to make these forces their own so that... the family be strong with the strength of God" (no. 23) [111].  
Let us turn our eyes briefly to some of the ways in which marriage and the family are meant to be schools of life and love, remembering that in the school of the family, as in any school, subjects are not learned unless they are taught, the best teacher being always (and perhaps only) the one who believes in and lives what he or she teaches.

The family, school of love for the children  
A first point to bear in mind here is that children do not spontaneously fall in love with their parents or with their brothers or sisters. They have to learn to love. Falling in love is an adult or adolescent phenomenon, not one of childhood. It is not spontaneously but in response to the dedication, patience, and sacrifice of others, that children learn to love them.  
If children normally do learn to love, it is fundamentally because they have experienced being loved within the natural setting of the family: by their parents in the first place, and perhaps also by their older brothers and sisters. St. Thomas teaches that nothing moves a person to love so much as to know oneself loved (see Summa theologiae, I-II, 26, art. 2). Children who are loved by their parents will learn to love in return. The persevering dedication of their parents to them - also with the "demands" of love - will gradually teach them that love means giving. And, under their parents' constant love and guidance, they too will learn to love each other. Here one sees the colossal privilege of the task of parents. Not only to give life, but also to teach love.  
Nothing is more destructive to happiness than the loss of faith in love. It is to let oneself be lured on to the road to Hell to permit doubts about the presence or possibility of love in one's life, thinking that one can neither give love nor receive it: I am too selfish to love others, or others are too selfish to love me. Today the temptation (or the beginning of the temptation) is there for many people, and it is strong. I love no one. No one loves me. I cannot find anyone to love; therefore others are not lovable. No one loves me; therefore I am not lovable. Many people spend years trying to fight off such temptations. Those who do not succeed can end in suicide.  
The best natural safeguard against these ultimate temptations is the unique experience of living and growing in a family - that place where no one is unloved, not even the most unlovable. Parents tend to love each of their children, even - and especially - the worst. Then the children learn that there is a love which is not conditioned on merit and is not withdrawn because of defects. Children who have grown up in a family like that and so have experienced being unconditionally loved, are in a good position to measure up to the challenge of love, inside and outside the family. The lessons - on both the natural and the supernatural level - are there in the parable of the Prodigal Son. Without some experience of a father's or, even more especially, of a mother's love, it is difficult to realize the unconditional nature of the love God has for each one of us: "Can a woman forget the child of her womb? And even if she could forget, yet I will not forget you" (Is 49:15).  
If parents are generous in loving their children, brothers and sisters gradually learn to be generous among themselves, to understand, to forgive, to make up. Then the family really becomes, as John Paul II says, "the first school of how to be human" [112]: a school that prepares the children for life, in a special way for modern life, where people are running out of patience with one another, where negative judgments are rife, where other person's defects become an obsession and forgiveness a rarity, where meanness and intolerance seem to be gaining acceptance as codes of social behavior. If we said above that the privileged task of parents is to teach love as well as to give life, we can add without exaggeration that their mission goes even farther; it is to save love - through a work of incarnation that humanizes love for their children, so that it is not a mere word for them but a reality truly present in their daily lives. It is then that children begin to respond, and can be taught and led to respond. After all, even though parents may expect or require obedience and respect of their children, these will be given poorly, or not at all, if not given in response to generous love.  
Generosity draws people together in unity and peace. Calculation and meanness produce division and hostility. It all begins in the family. "In healthy family life", says Pope Benedict XVI, "we experience some of the fundamental elements of peace: justice and love between brothers and sisters, the role of authority expressed by parents, loving concern for the members who are weaker because of youth, sickness or old age, mutual help in the necessities of life, readiness to accept others and, if necessary, to forgive them" (Message for the World Day of Peace (2008), no. 3).  
If so many families today are no longer the school of love they were meant to be, it is almost always because husband and wife, the founders of each family, have not built well from their own initial love. Families do not always become schools of love, and could even degenerate into schools of selfishness. They are as parents make them. Parents will not give unconditioned love to their children unless they have been trying to give it to each other.

The family, school of love for the spouses  
It is in relation to their children that parents ought most clearly to see that love is a challenge calling for generosity and patience. The living-out of this concern for their children should reconfirm them in their own experience that falling in love is easy, whereas standing and growing in love are not.  
We have suggested that children do not spontaneously "fall in love" with their parents. But, of course, the children would not normally be there at all if the parents had not originally fallen in love with each other. There is a lot of spontaneity to this romantic process of "falling in love" which usually precedes and inspires the decision of a man and a woman to marry. The process is highly sentimental and filled with feeling, tending to idealize the other person and seeing few defects in him or her - for, as is often said, "love is blind". Peculiarly, this seems to be the design of nature: that "romance", strong in feeling and weak in perception, should lead people to want to bind themselves together in marriage.  
However, conjugal love cannot depend only on romance or on feelings. In his Letter, John Paul II says, "Love is true when it creates the good of persons and of communities; it creates that good and gives it to others"... "Love is demanding... Nowadays people need to rediscover this demanding love, for it is the truly firm foundation of the family" [113].  
Human love in marriage, which promises so much happiness, will therefore only reach fulfilment if it is worked at. John Paul II says that "this fulfilment represents both a task and a challenge. The task involves the spouses in living out their original covenant" (no. 7), in being faithful to the mutual love they have pledged. This already poses a challenge to each of them with regard to the other. So much depends on how well Christian spouses understand this challenge, and how generously they respond to it.  
In his Letter John Paul II speaks of "the dangers faced by love", and he adds: "Here one thinks first of all of selfishness..." (no. 14). Individual selfishness is the enemy of love; selfishness fostered by our worst defect which is pride. Selfishness and pride have to be fought; if they are not, they destroy love and unity and happiness; and place the soul in eternal danger. Humility is one of the essential weapons for the fight: the humility of constantly asking pardon of God for one's personal sins; and in married life, the humility especially of asking one's partner for forgiveness - even if one thinks him or her mainly to blame.  
"Husbands and wives, love one another", Scripture says (see Eph 5:21-33). It is a command: each of you must be more concerned to give to your spouse, than to receive from him or her. Such constant self-giving is the way of Christ, who gave himself on the Cross - for each of us, despite our little worth. It is also, paradoxically, the way of happiness.  
St. Josemaría too would help spouses realize what this implies, using simple but keen psychology. Talking with a married couple he would often ask, perhaps beginning with the wife, "Do you love your husband?" "Of course", she would reply. "Do you love him very much?" "Very much!" "Do you love him with his defects...?" If there were a moment's hesitation at this, he would add: "because if you don't, you don't love him". Then he would ask the same of the husband.  
It is so clear. If, when marrying, one is not prepared to love the other person with his or her defects, it is not, we repeat, a real person whom one wants to marry. To learn to love someone with defects is of the essence of true love and loyalty, and is always a major task for spouses. Mutual respect and acceptance - respect of each for the other, defects and all - is the only attitude that holds together a couple, a family, a society.

Covenant, communion, children  
John Paul speaks of another challenge, within the covenant of married love, that is posed to both spouses together. It regards the possible fruit of their love. "The children born to them - and here is the challenge - should consolidate that covenant, enriching and deepening the conjugal communion of the father and mother". He adds: "When this does not occur, we need to ask if the selfishness which lurks even in the love of man and woman as a result of the human inclination to evil is not stronger than this love" (Letter, no. 7).  
Later on, he develops this, in the sense that when love does not face up to the natural challenges that accompany it, it can find itself in danger. As the first among "the dangers faced by love", he again mentions selfishness and adds: "Here one thinks... not only of the selfishness of individuals, but also of couples..." (14). So he insists on the danger posed to married love not just by reciprocal selfishness in the relation between husband and wife, but by the shared selfishness of both in regard to their children: the danger of a couple being calculating in their attitude towards them. Children are properly the fruit of a couple's love; yet it is a poor love that calculates. Calculated giving, especially in giving life, seldom expresses - or strengthens - true love. Truer love tends to be generous, and generosity tries to avoid thinking in terms of calculation.  
Parents with a large family may have a busy time trying to create peace between their sons and daughters; but they will have a fuller human experience than parents who find themselves in the increasingly difficult situation of trying to keep peace between themselves and an only child. Even if these latter parents manage to achieve some sort of peace, it is not likely to be a loving and worthwhile accord based on mutual sacrifice, but a "botherless" peace, bought at the cost of yielding to the child's whims, and not likely to last or to induce respect.  
St. Josemaría echoes Pope John Paul's point: "Selfishness, in any of its forms, is opposed to that love for God which ought to rule our lives. This is a fundamental point that must be borne in mind, with regard to marriage and to the size of a family" (Conversations, no. 93). Parenthood was something Josemaría spoke of with enthusiasm, seeing in it a divinely given grace and privilege - especially in the case of women. In Brazil in 1974, he said to a large group of married persons: "motherhood is something holy and joyful, good and noble, blessed and beloved. Mothers: congratulations!" [114] He would constantly repeat that "motherhood makes a woman beautiful".

Vocation to sanctity  
So far we have been speaking of married and family love on a natural plane: of the beauty of the ideal it proposes and the challenge of the obstacles it meets. We have taken up Pope John Paul II's words on the enemies to love - selfishness above all - and considered too the simple, optimistic, and penetrating psychology of St. Josemaría Escrivá as to how such difficulties can be tackled and overcome. All that we have noted can apply to any marriage. But of course neither John Paul II nor Josemaría presents marriage as a purely natural ideal; nor do they suggest that its challenges and its beauty can be achieved with natural forces alone. John Paul II, like all his predecessors, emphasizes that marriage for Christians is a sacrament; and that husband and wife must rely on sacramental grace in order to live up to their love and commitment as spouses and parents (see Letter, nos. 15, 16).  
In St. Josemaría's view of Christian marriage we find the same insistence on its sacramental character. But another and striking point of emphasis constantly appears. Marriage is presented as raised not merely to the level of a sacrament, a privileged means of grace, but to that of a vocation - a personal call to a way of life essentially aimed at holiness.  
"These world crises are crises of saints" (The Way, no. 301), he wrote in the 1930s. Only the Saints are strong with the "strength of God". The life of the founder of Opus Dei was devoted to "opening up the divine paths of the earth" (to use a phrase often on his lips), to convincing ordinary people everywhere that their secular jobs and occupations are ways to God and ways of God: that God is to be found not only at the end of the road, but at every step of these mundane ways, which therefore should be seen in themselves as a means for finding him and loving him.  
Sanctity - the great formula to solve the real crises of the world! For many people, the most revolutionary aspect of the message of the founder of Opus Dei is how he applied this specifically to marriage, presenting it not only as a sacrament, but above all as a vocation; communicating to millions of couples the conviction that God calls them to marriage, and in doing so calls them to holiness; that they have the great mission to make their conjugal love and parental love expressions and ways of loving God. They can love God greatly, precisely through loving each other and their children greatly. Time and again young and not so young people have paused at length over that other point at the start of The Way: "You laugh because I tell you that you have a 'vocation for marriage'? Well, you have just that: a vocation" (no. 27).  
Holy families are the special need of our times. They can be formed only by couples who are trying to be saints. Only in such families will good be stronger than evil and able to overcome it. Only from such families will that good spread which can save the world.  
Among the saints, Josemaría Escrivá was undoubtedly the one who most helped married persons to look on their marriage as a way of dedication to God and as a radical vocation to sanctity. "For almost forty years", he wrote in 1968, "I have been preaching the vocational sense of marriage. So often when talking to men and women who thought that a life of dedication to God and a noble clean human love were incompatible, I have seen their eyes light up as they heard me say that marriage is a divine way on earth!" (Conversations, 91).  
Marriage - a divine way! It is certainly a daring statement! Seldom if ever in the history of the Church has not only the constitutional goodness of matrimony, but its full sense as a vocation to sanctity, been so proclaimed.  
For St. Josemaría, marriage was to be looked on as a personal calling from God to a man or woman so that, as spouse and parent, he or she would cooperate with him in a divine task; to achieve personal holiness, to help their spouse to be a saint, and to work together for the happiness and sanctification of their family. The true "beauty of the family", he taught, must be seen as deriving from "the supernatural task involved in the founding of a home, the fruit of sanctification which is hidden in conjugal duties" [115].  
He insisted that love for God, in the case of husband and wife, is inseparable from their loving one another, and would help them realize what this principle implied. One love is a means to the other. Growth in one love is not possible without growth in the other. Married people, he repeated, "have been called by God to come to divine love also by means of human love" (Conversations, 93).  
"Married couples have a grace of state - the grace of the sacrament - to live all of the human and Christian virtues which must characterize life lived close together: understanding, good humour, patience, the readiness to forgive, tactfulness in mutual dealings. The important thing is not to give up the effort to live those small virtues, or let nerves or pride or personal manias get the better of them. For that, husband and wife need to grow in interior life, and to learn from the Holy Family to put great care into living the virtues characteristic of a Christian home; doing so out of a human and a supernatural motive at one and the same time. And, I repeat, they will not lack God's grace" (ib. 108). There is great wisdom and power in the spirituality underlying this passage. The principle that "grace builds on nature" is specially true of the sacramental graces, including the graces proper to the state of matrimony. If these graces are relied on, they will help to activate all of the genuine expressions of true conjugal and family love.  
Speaking to a group of husbands, St. Josemaría told them: "The sacrament of matrimony provides spiritual graces, help from Heaven, so that husband and wife can be happy and bring children into the world... It is good and holy that you express your love for one another. I bless you, and I bless that love of yours, as I bless the love of my parents. Try to be happy in marriage. If you are not happy, it is because you have not made up your minds to be so. God gives you the means... Change, if you have to change. Love your wives. Respect them. Devote to your children all the time they need" [116].  
A recurring theme in his preaching is that happiness - on the human level too - is the consequence of dedication and self-forgetfulness. In one of his books, he writes: "Only whoever forgets himself, and gives himself to God and to others - also in marriage - can be happy on earth, with a happiness that prepares and anticipates that of Heaven" [117]. Elsewhere he insists, "Marriage demands a lot of sacrifice; but what peace and what consolation it provides. And if that is not the way it works, then they are poor spouses who have come together" [118].  
The problem with our modern world is that it wants to be happy by getting, not by giving; and that runs counter to the most basic rules of human living. In the end we cannot and should not want to ignore the fact that happiness - also the happiness that marriage promises - is not possible without generosity and sacrifice. St. Josemaría used often to say that happiness has its roots in the shape of a Cross (see The Forge, no. 28). It is the rule and apparent paradox of the gospel: only by "losing" and giving ourselves - the essence of love - can we begin to find our selves and, even more than ourselves, the happiness we are made for.  
No preaching or teaching on marriage will tend to renew married life if it does not reflect this basic truth. As the Catechism says: "It is by following Christ, renouncing themselves, and taking up their crosses that spouses will be able to 'receive' the original meaning of marriage and live it with the help of Christ. This grace of Christian matrimony is a fruit of Christ's Cross, the source of all Christian life" (1615).

Marriage, institution - and vocation!  
We spoke in one of our first chapters of the close link between the ends of marriage - where human and divine love meet and work hand in hand. St. Josemaría's understanding of the vital connection between these ends appears in the following passages, where he contemplates them not just in an institutional but in a vocational light.  
"It is important that the spouses acquire a clear sense of the dignity of their vocation, that they realize they have been called by God to come to divine love also by means of human love; that they have been chosen from eternity to cooperate with the creative power of God in the procreation and afterwards in the education of children; that God asks them to bear witness to all the Christian virtues in the whole of their home and family life" (Conversations, 93).  
When referring to the unbreakable nature of the marriage bond, Josemaría always went to the heart of the matter, presenting this property of every true marriage as something corresponding to the aspirations of human love and to the quest for happiness. "The indissolubility of matrimony is not a whim of the Church, nor even a simple ecclesiastical law. It is of natural and divine law, and it responds perfectly to our human nature and to the supernatural order of grace. That is why, in the immense majority of cases, it is an indispensable condition of happiness for the spouses, and of security, also spiritual security, for the children" (ibid., 97). For him, indissolubility meant the permanence of a bond of love: of a strong and voluntary love, which has to be cared for so that it not only survives the passage of the years but grows better, becoming stronger and firmer. "The love of Christian spouses is like wine, which improves with the years and increases in value... It is a splendid treasure, that God has wished to grant to you. Look after it well. Do not throw it away! Preserve it!" [119].  
Spouses "have been called by God"... have been chosen from eternity...": nothing can be more personal than such a divine vocation. And in the purpose St. Josemaría assigns to this vocation - "to come to divine love also by means of human love" - he surely expresses the essential content of the bonum coniugum; the "good of the spouses". To know the goodness of God, to open oneself to that goodness, to fit oneself for its possession and eternal enjoyment in Heaven: upon this rest the ultimate destiny and "good" of each person. The good of the spouses is found in that combining and developing of all of husband's and wife's capacity for love, both human and divine. Human love coming from and leading to divine love; spousal love that becomes parental love that becomes family love; good spreading in the family and from the family, with all the power of God; with the strength that saves the world.  
Love can be killed by law - by bad laws, of which we have many today. It cannot be brought back to life by law, not even by good laws, although good laws are necessary and can certainly help. It is not in Parliaments, nor in Supreme Courts, nor in United Nations Conferences that love can be revived, but only in families.

What is at stake  
In his Letter to Families, John Paul II does not pass over the fact that Christ's message on marriage and the family may appear hard from a merely human point of view, above all if it is that of an individualist. But he emphasizes that this message is both beautiful and worthwhile, as well as of the greatest importance to the world around us. He recalls that even the Apostles had a first reaction of surprise and even fear at Our Lord's teaching about the indissoluble nature of the marriage bond (see Mt 19:10); but that "overcoming their initial fears even about marriage and the family, they grew in courage. They came to understand that marriage and family are a true vocation which comes from God himself and is an apostolate: the apostolate of the laity. Families are meant to contribute to the transformation of the earth and the renewal of the world, of creation and of all humanity" (Letter, no. 18).  
Parents: each of you has to learn to put his or her own small personal concerns into the background; and together - in your glorious "family project" - , you have to learn to overcome your own small mutual differences, to forgive and to forget them. You have to raise your hearts - each one of you individually, and both together - to what God is proposing to you; to what society, without knowing, needs from you; and to what your children, perhaps also without fully realizing it, have the right to expect from you.  
Yes, there are difficulties, for each of us suffers from the consequences of Original Sin. We can even say that the family itself suffers from the Fall. It can be, it should be, a great school of love; but it can also be a school where love is learned poorly - almost always because it is taught poorly. In the worst of cases, the family can even be a school where the opposite of love is learned, because the opposite of love is taught. Instead of being a school of love and generosity, it can become a school of calculation and selfishness. It will be as the parents make it. Here is the greatness of the challenge, mission, and ideal placed before christian parents today.  
If you dwell on the beauty of your vocation and the nobility and importance of your mission, its difficulties seem much less. And above all, as John Paul repeats, you will have God's help: "Do not be afraid of the risks! God's strength is always far more powerful than your difficulties! Immeasurably greater than the evil at work in the world is the power of the Sacrament of Reconciliation... Much more influential than the corruption present in the world is the divine power of the Sacrament of Confirmation... And incomparably greater than all is the power of the Eucharist" (Letter, no. 18). Further, he insists that married couples have "the 'grace of state' which follows from the Sacrament of Matrimony" (no. 16). Those couples who trust in that - only those who trust in that - can succeed. "Life according to the Gospel... is beyond man's abilities, [and is] possible only as the result of a gift of God" (Veritatis splendor, 23). Look then for God's gifts in prayer and in the Sacraments; and you will find all the strength you need.  
The foundations of humanity are at stake today. On Good Friday 1994, John Paul II said that without Christ and without the Cross of Christ, man "destroys himself". Three days later, on Easter Sunday, he did not hesitate to affirm that "the family is the principal source of humanity". A strong warning, in the context of the Cross, in one assertion; and a strong affirmation of hope, in the context of the Resurrection, in the other.

15. Family Life - with Vitality and Personality!  
In the 1960s, in the wake of the Second Vatican Council, the Church made a "preferential option" for the poor. This really included all of us, since spiritually we are all poor. John Paul II, and Benedict XVI after him, have made it clear that the Church's special option today is for the family, on which depends the health and cohesion of society. Throughout the preceding pages, we have seen that the family is the natural school of love and understanding, of the spirit of give and take, of forgiveness... And of many other things, among them that unique and irreplaceable sex education which takes place between brothers and sisters as in their arguments and fights they gradually mull over what really makes boys and girls different and begin to sense some of the deeper and truly human differences and complementarities between the sexes. This and much else is the potential of the family.  
But the family today is not just neglected and marginalized, as so often happens with the poor; it is under siege. The family is under siege today, and it is weak. It is taking a battering and in many places is going under. So many parents are aware of the situation; so many do not know what to do. Supernaturally they have to do a lot: to pray more, rely more on the sacrament of marriage and its particular sacramental graces. And, humanly, they have to give a lot to their family: not material things, but personality. This is the point I want to make: parents today have to give more personality - much more personality - to their family.  
I like to put it as a question to parents: Is yours a family with personality? I don't mean is your house distinctive, with superior architecture or better furniture... Does your family stand out from others, from those of your neighbors, not for its comfort or for the number and quality of its gadgets, but for its vitality, for its human style, for the quality of its family life?  
Are your children attracted more to neighboring houses, or are neighboring children drawn more to yours? Or are yours and theirs drawn more to the nearest malls? As happens to families that are a little more than places to sleep or be fed or watch TV in, but don't draw or inspire or wake people up to life, because they lack the personality to do it.

To influence - or to be influenced  
What does the idea of a family with (or without) personality suggest? One way of defining a strong personality in an individual is to say that the person influences (for good or for bad) more than he or she is influenced. A family with a "weak personality" is going to be influenced, and perhaps dominated, by the values or anti-values surrounding it. So a question all concerned parents need to put directly to themselves is: does our family influence the social atmosphere surrounding it, or is it more influenced by it? Not the social atmosphere of a town or city as a whole, but the immediate atmosphere of relatives, neighbours and friends, ours and our childrens'? Is the nature and character and quality of our family being shaped more and more in the way we, its founders, want, or is it being manipulated and exploited by others?  
When I was a boy I don't think I ever thought about whether the family I grew up in had personality. I just liked it and felt at home there. And I doubt my parents ever asked themselves the question I have suggested: what sort of personality does our family have? They did not have to, because, thank God, all of the families that were our friends had plenty of life, plenty of children, plenty of values. There was no TV then of course. We went to the movies once or twice a week (and that was a sort of special family occasion to look forward to), but for the most part we - the boys and the girls - just mixed together and did normal things together. And the normal things were almost always good things. It just happened that way. It doesn't so easily just happen that way today.  
Today we are all being influenced - and not for good - on a massive scale. We need to realize it and to find the human force, along with the grace of God, to withstand these negative and often dehumanizing influences. We are a market, and the marketeers want us to be as captive a market as possible. They are trying to manipulate us, especially young people. It is not a moment to be passive, least of all a moment for parental passivity.

The real power of home schooling  
What can parents do about it? They can turn their family back into what it is meant to be - a school! For it is indeed the first natural school.  
Before public education became the norm, the vast majority of parents literally had to educate their children, bring them up, themselves. While that might be an idea to return to, few parents are in a position to undertake total home teaching, imparting to their children full courses in Literature, Physics and so on. Leave that for the established schools. What parents have to teach is values: not just abstract values, but incarnated values reflected not only through the moral principles that the parents hold but in the way they act, in the whole atmosphere in which the family lives. Parents have to be the source not mainly of knowledge and not only of life, but also of inspiration, ideals, independence and strength for their children.  
One hundred years ago, and maybe even fifty, parents in the West could reasonably enough trust the standards their children received at educational establishments outside the home. This whole situation has been profoundly modified over the last few decades in a way that transcends the question of the values absorbed in school. It is not only that the outlook of young people is molded nowadays more by the atmosphere of the recreational or sporting centers they frequent than by what they hear in the classroom. We have gone far beyond that. The real "school" which controls the making or unmaking of social and personal values is constituted by the media; and this school is more and more dominantly present within the home itself.  
The progression from films to TV to videos to the internet means that social values can no longer be considered an outside factor with regard to family life. Through the media, the social culture makes its way daily into practically all modern homes, profoundly influencing the values (if any) that are being inculcated there. It has become the home school, displacing - if there is not enough family personality to counter it - the family itself as the real domestic school.

The attraction of evil  
If you happened to see Mel Gibson's film, "The Passion of the Christ", you may have been struck by that androgynous figure of evil or the Devil that he introduced, with a face that was in some way handsome or attractive but spooky... Possibly you also saw a TV interview where Gibson was asked why, if he wished to represent evil, he gave it a powerful and even attractive face. And his answer, clearly backed by his own life experience: "because evil does attract. But the more of it you let into yourself, the emptier you become".  
Evil is attractive. However, it is anything but vital; it deadens you, draining life and leaving you empty. It is persuasive, but not inspiring; on the contrary it sucks every good inspiration or ideal or hope out of you. I don't know if you are a J.K. Rawling fan or not, but there are passages in the Harry Potter novels that can make people think. Do you remember the Dementors: "Dementors... glory in decay and despair, they drain peace, hope and happiness out of the air around them. Get too near a Dementor and every good feeling, every happy memory, will be sucked out of you. If it can, the Dementor will feed on you long enough to reduce you to something like itself - soulless and evil. You'll be left with nothing but the worst experiences of your life" [120].

The experience of good  
That is why it is so important for each life to be backed by good experiences; and the most important ones are those had in the family: being loved despite not being too lovable, being forgiven and being taught to forgive, being corrected justly (and sometimes not altogether justly) and learning to accept it. Having a good time and learning to help others have a good time. If such family experiences are strong, they originate a capital that even the most prodigal son or daughter (because prodigals there will be) cannot fully dissipate. With God's grace, it will in the end prove enough to draw a person home to Heaven.  
But such a family atmosphere has to be built up. It is a wonderful task. Yet it naturally takes an effort. It is built on small but original little memories, where my family remains not just the place of cokes and raiding the fridge, but of Mom's apple pie or home-made cookies or of Dad's reminiscences - and by those examples I mean almost anything, just so long as they are an expression of Mom's or Dad's personal way of giving time and showing thought and affection.  
But what family atmosphere or personality - none at all! - is being built in those anonymous and mass-produced homes where all sit passively together as an homogenized audience before the same TV program, or each goes off and gets lost separately watching his or her favorite program, or wandering in virtual isolation as an internet browser? Where is the life and love that must be at the very heart of the family? What do we have there but families drained of vitality, depersonalized families, faceless families? And how many of them there are today!  
The more TV is watched in a family, the more indistinguishable that family is from the family next door or down the street, and the less personality it has as a family. In such a nondescript and insipid home, what is there of worth to be remembered? And yet the family has to be a place to remain cherished in one's memories. If evil is making its way into one's house, then parents must try to stop it as much as they can, with their own self-control to begin with. But their response has to be more forceful and more positive still. When evil is making its way into the home, it is there, in the home itself, that parents have to produce even more goodness.  
This is the challenge. It is no small one, but there is every reason to tackle it with optimism and confidence - based precisely on the attraction of goodness, and on the power of God to help us create it. I like to recall one of most marvelous phrases of St. Thomas Aquinas: bonum potentius est quam malum [121]: "good is stronger than evil"; and, in the end, it attracts more. Parents have to put it there, in the home. The closer they are to God, who is Goodness itself, the more inspiration and help they will get.  
A family is a school of life and of love. But if it does not have a certain minimum vigour, normally expressed also in terms of size, it is not likely that individualism and selfishness - the enemies of life worth living and worth loving - will have much of their sharp edges rubbed off; nor is it likely that the family itself will have a human personality and impact to draw other families around it to the source of its ideals. In his Letter to Families of 1994, John Paul II insisted: "Families today have too little "human" life. There is a shortage of people with whom to create and share the common good; and yet that good by its nature demands to be created and shared with others: bonum est diffusivum sui: 'good is diffusive of itself'" (no. 10).

Control or inventiveness?  
So, what to do about the values and especially the anti-values picked up in a TV-internet dominated home atmosphere? Remain passive? No. Some concerned parents may try to govern or prevent the entry to the home of these anti-values. Filters will help; but the task is not easy, and we wouldn't have gotten very far if in the end all we had produced was a thoroughly sanitized but sterile home where nothing vigorous or fruitful can develop. Besides, anything that smacks of blanket censorship can provoke a negative reaction in young people if they feel they are subject to a control that probably their friends are free from.  
These negative reactions may be avoided or at least reduced by means of regular family councils where, among other matters, the programs to be seen during the coming week are decided on; perhaps with a final say reserved to the parents. When borderline cases are allowed, it would then be specially important not only for one or both parents to be present, but also to have an open discussion at the end of the program where its positive and negative values are discussed. Properly handled, these sessions can develop an adequate critical appreciation in the children and even put them in a position not only to defend the family practice among their peers but also to get them to take part in it.  
But - many parents will say - I'm not a film critic. You have to be! You have to be the critical conscience of your children, or better, the formator, the stimulator, of their consciences. The full positive effect may only come later on: "Yes, my Dad and Mom had a conscience about that sort of stuff. And I too need to have one".  
And another point needs to be made clear. It is not enough for today's parents to act now just as their own parents may have acted, even if they, like me, had the great fortune of having very good parents. Times have changed. The efforts and sacrifices that may have been enough for parents twenty or forty or sixty years ago, to put into building their families, are no longer enough. They have to put more.  
It is good, but not enough, to pray together. Families have to be together, to talk and argue together, to plan and originate things together. This is what is meant by developing families with personality: creating a forceful, interesting, and attractive family atmosphere or family life, expressed not only in care, friendship, loyalty and solidarity, but also in activities that both develop talents in the children and, above all, keep them interested.  
What sort of activities? It would probably be a mistake to over-specify them. They will have to be looked for, tried out, improved, discarded and replaced by others, and carried out either simply by the family members themselves or, more reasonably and ideally, in conjunction with other like-minded families. Amateur theatrics, musical groups, sports mini-competitions, chess championships, debates, life-skills, biking, family-movie nights, community-help initiatives... are a few of the activities that come to mind. Inventiveness will discover many others, and family personality will be all the richer for having its inventiveness tested.  
Parents can know they have come up with a winner - for the time being - when their house begins to attract other children, who come because "at So-and-so's one always has a good time". This sort of endeavor is helped by having a large family. It is equally helped by having a large number of like-minded friends. You need a network of friendly strong families to sustain this culture of your own home. But in the end what is most decisive is the initiative and dedication of the parents themselves.

Generosity creates strength  
A child is a gift of God that sometimes it is not possible to receive; just as at times it is not possible to receive all of his other gifts. But then we should miss them, feel the deprivation involved in not being able to have them.  
G.K Chesterton was one of those truly remarkable men from whom we always have something to learn. His Autobiography tells more about his philosophy than it gives details of his adult life. But it does say a lot about his childhood and his family background - which was the forging of his life. Chesterton's mother was one of 25 children. She married Edward Chesterton, a man of a mild Victorian Protestantism, but of extraordinary inventiveness whose first hobby and enthusiasm was his family.  
Maisie Ward, in her biography of Chesterton, writes: "These two [his parents] had no fear of life; they belonged to a generation which cheerfully created a home and brought fresh life into being. In doing it, they did a thousand other things, so that the home they made was full of vital energies for the children who were to grow up in it. Gilbert recalls his father as a man of a dozen hobbies, his study as a place where these hobbies formed strata of exciting products, awakening youthful covetousness in the matter of a new paint-box, satisfying youthful imagination by the production of a toy theatre... Edward Chesterton did not use up his mental powers in the family business [he inherited from his father]" [122]. She leaves us to draw the obvious conclusion; he kept a large portion of those powers to spend them on the business of his family.  
In Chesterton's own words: "The old-fashioned Englishman, like my father, sold houses for his living but filled his own house with his life" [123]. It costs money to fill one's house with things, good things. It costs more to put one's life there, to fill one's home with one's self, not with one's whims and likes and dislikes but with one's self-gift, with one's dedication, with one's small, silly, love-inspired games and do-it-yourself entertainments. If it is really love that inspires them, they gradually build up the capital that can save many lives from final bankruptcy.  
In the first chapter of St. Luke's Gospel we are told of what the mission of John the Baptist will be. One phrase should hold our attention because it is so pertinent, so incisive, so challenging: "He will turn the hearts of parents towards their children". This is the first step today in the renewal of the family. When, in today's situation of need and crisis, parents' hearts are really turned towards their children, God's inspiration and help will not be lacking and they will become parents of families that are sources of goodness strong enough to counter and overcome the evil that presents itself so aggressively today, families that show a vitality and personality which attract and inspire - far more than the poverty and impersonality of contemporary family life or whatever remains of it.

Appendix: Abortion  
What is abortion?  
The answer to this question, until the early 1970s, was very simple. Abortion meant killing an unborn child, killing a human being whose peculiar weakness consisted in its inability to survive outside its mother's womb. And there were two moral evaluations of this action:  
(I) that it was a justifiable homicide - in certain cases. This was the position of many non-Catholics, although certainly not of all;  
(2) that it was an unjustifiable homicide, that is, that it was always murder, and therefore could never be licit. This was the Catholic position, shared by the Greek Orthodox Church and by many other religious and nonreligious people.  
The reasoning behind the first position - justifiable homicide - was simple: that in the extreme case (the only one contemplated) of conflict between the life of the mother and the life of the child, the mother's life is more valuable, and the child's life should be sacrificed so that the mother can survive. The extreme case would be a pregnancy such that, if allowed to come to term, the mother - and perhaps the child too - would die.  
What is one to think of this position? Two things: first, one can easily accept that it was inspired by a sincere humanitarian feeling; second, that the principles on which it was based - that one human life is worth more than another, and that one can kill an innocent person in order to save another - opened the door inevitably to the position on abortion that has rapidly become generalized today: the "abortion on demand," position, with no more justification than the fact that the mother - or perhaps the State - wants it.  
As regards the Catholic position, it is enough to say for the moment that it is based on the clear principle that every human being receives his life directly from God, and only God can take that life away, unless a person fortifies his right to life by a voluntary criminal aggression. It is not possible to imagine a more innocent person than an unborn child; therefore, one cannot directly kill the child for any reason whatsoever.  
Such was the situation as regards abortion not very many years ago - overall, a situation where it was easy to indicate and describe the points of agreement and the points of disagreement. There was agreement between both sides as to the nature of abortion: that it meant killing a child, that it was homicide, that the being in the mother's womb was a human being. And there was disagreement as to the licitness of this homicide: for some it was always illicit; for others it was, in certain grave cases, justifiable and licit. It is worth adding that even in the countries where this latter viewpoint prevailed and the civil law recognized the legality of abortion in such extreme cases, the same legislation forbade and punished abortions performed in the absence of such exceptional circumstances.

The position today  
Now, if we examine the present-day situation, it so happens that to this question - What is abortion? - we find not two but three answers:  
(1) that it is a nonjustifiable homicide - this is the Catholic position, reaffirmed by Vatican Council II in the strongest terms, in the Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, where abortion is referred to as an "abominable crime" (no. 51);  
(2) that it is a justifiable homicide in certain circumstances - the position of certain non-Catholics; and  
(3) that it is not a homicide at all!  
This third answer reflects the position with which I wish especially to deal, for it is the "pro-choice" ideological position - the new "moral" basis - by which they seek to justify what cannot be justified.

Reformulating the problem  
Abortion, say the pro-choicers, is not a homicide at all, for a very simple reason: that what is killed is not a human being, that what is in the uterus is not human.  
It is obvious that this supposition means a complete reformulation of the abortion problem: so complete in fact that if the supposition itself is accepted, the problem aspect of abortion practically disappears, and abortion becomes a matter - so it is suggested - devoid of any difficulties of a moral nature.

Why the reformulation?  
Perhaps the first thing to do in relation to this new position is to ask why and how it should have arisen in such a few years. It is not difficult to find the answer  
Everyone likes to feel humanitarian. The "liberals" of today's moral positivist school like not only to feel humanitarian but also to be able to proclaim themselves such.  
The liberal humanitarian sense of non-Catholics of forty years ago found no excessive difficulty in accepting that the life of an unborn child should be sacrificed to save the life of a mother. The years have passed, and, with the years, two main factors have intervened. One is the fact that advances in medicine have practically eliminated the extreme case of having to choose between saving either the mother's life or the child's. Despite this - and here is the second factor - the demand for abortions has increased. There are many motives behind this increase. They include some "indications" of a more or less medical nature: the mother's poor health, the strain that a pregnancy imposes on her nerves, and so on. The main motive, however, is simply the growing birth-control mentality.  
Despite their being wrapped up in apparently disinterested references to world population problems, the motives for abortion in one individual case after another - at least in the more developed countries - can almost always be reduced to an inability to look on the child with love. It is, after all, an incapacity to love that makes a couple think of their unborn baby as nothing more than a burden: the burden of the pregnancy and of the care the child will require after birth. It is this incapacity to love that makes a family dwell on the fact that, if the child is born, they will have to give up some material comfort. It is this incapacity to love that makes a mother not want to bear and give birth to the child she has conceived.

Turning the fetus into a "thing"  
To kill a child in order to save the life of a mother was not repugnant to the humanitarian sense of some liberals. To kill a child in order to save the convenience of the mother - her reluctance to go through with an existing pregnancy - or to save the well-being of the other children or the financial position of the family: to accept this is to ask a lot of the humanitarian sense of anyone, however liberal he or she may be.  
The solution has been found quite simply. So, it is too much to sacrifice a child's life for the sake of a mother's caprice, or a family's standard of living, or a society's welfare?.. Then, let it not be the life of a child that is sacrificed; let it be no more than the life of a fetus. Let us conclude, moreover (according to someone's happy theory), that the fetus is not human (let us conclude it, I say, because we certainly cannot prove it), and what we are left with, after all that, is neither homicide nor infanticide, but only feticide - which (let us be persuaded) is no more significant in the moral order than the killing of some microbes (also foreign and unwanted bodies) by means of an injection of antibiotics.  
Here is the new moral view of the abortion question. We are going to have to face the objection (so they would seem to have reasoned) that abortion is homicide; and certainly, at least in the new cases we are interested in, it would be difficult to justify a homicide... Let us not waste time trying to justify it. Let us say, in all simplicity, that it is not a homicide, because what is aborted has not a human nature; it is therefore not a member of our human race, it is a thing. And because things possess no rights, the problem quite disappears.

Two-stage abortion  
What this view offers us is, so to speak, a two-stage abortion - a physical operation preceded by a metaphysical operation, a physical abortion with a metaphysical prerequisite: namely, that of suppressing the human identity of the living being in the womb. Once this metaphysical operation has been performed (a truly painless operation, provided one applies a little anesthesia to one's conscience), the surgical or pharmacological operation necessary to suppress what "remains" in the uterus offers no special difficulty, since this "remainder" - duly disenfranchised from among the race of man and deprived of its human status and rights - is not a human being; it is no more than a nonhuman thing.  
Let us grasp this clearly. The essential argument of abortionists is not (except in two cases we will examine later on) that new indications or reasons for abortion have been discovered, new reasons of note that were hitherto unknown. Their argument is different, and it is important, I repeat, to grasp it. They are not mainly saying that there are more reasons than those formerly known, to justify killing what is in the womb. They are saying that what is in the womb has less importance than what was formerly believed; it has less value. It has no human value and possesses no human rights.

The Catholic argument  
The whole of the Catholic argument - and I would maintain that, from whatever angle one may consider the matter it is the only truly rational, truly scientific, and truly humanitarian argument - is that the unborn child is already a human being and enjoys all the natural rights of every human being, among which the main right is the right to life; and moreover, that its particular situation as a defenseless human being confers on it the right to special protection in the prescriptions of the civil law.  
It is interesting to recall that the United Nations, in plenary session in November 1959, unanimously approved a declaration of the rights of the child in the following terms: "The child, in virtue of its lack of physical and intellectual maturity, needs special protection and care, including adequate legal protection, both before and after birth." This declaration was renewed later on at the International Human Rights Conference, in Teheran, in May 1968.

Embryology gives supporting evidence  
From the theological viewpoint, specifically human life begins with the infusion, by God, of the soul into the new embryonic organism. Although there has been no dogmatic declaration on this point, the Magisterium of the Church has crystallized in the clear teaching that the beginning of this personal human life should be computed from the moment of conception: the moment in which the ovum has been fertilized [124]. This teaching is reflected in the relation between certain liturgical feasts - the Annunciation (March 25th) and Christmas; the Immaculate Conception and the Feast of the Nativity of Our Lady (September 8th) - and is supported by the dispositions of Canon Law (see canon 871). Much more significant and interesting is the fact that this universal teaching of the Church is fully borne out by all the scientific advances in modern embryology. So true is this that one can affirm that, from a scientific viewpoint, the truth of the Catholic teaching on this point has been placed beyond all doubt. Modern embryological research has shown that the human being, organically speaking, is fully constituted by the fertilization of the ovum, and that everything that follows is simply the process of development of an already existing human organism, without it being possible to indicate any subsequent datum or fact on which one could reasonably base the supposed beginning of a personal human life.

The arbitrariness of the abortionist position  
It is significant that abortionists or pro-choice people never speak of an unborn child. They rigorously use the term "embryo" or "fetus." If they are asked (a question not much to their liking) to define what is a fetus, they define it as "potential human life," speaking of it on occasion even as "potential life." And if they are obliged to pursue their pseudo-philosophical or pseudo-juridical line, they maintain that this potential life does not become real and actual human life - with its corresponding rights - until birth, or at least until the fetus is viable. This is pure arbitrariness. It is impossible to advance any rational or scientific principle or fact on which it can be based. It is simply the product of prejudice. Is anyone prepared seriously to maintain that what is born today is human, but that what was in the womb yesterday was not?. If one tries to make an argument out of viability, can one say that a newborn child is significantly more viable than a child still in his (or her) mother's womb? If anything, the child is definitely less viable. One has to put more care, and not less, in feeding him. One has to take greater precautions to make sure, for example, that he does not fall down the stairs, precautions that his mother guaranteed him far more effectively when he was still in the womb.  
If human personality and human rights are not acquired until one is really viable, until one can get by and survive by oneself, it is doubtful that any child less than six or seven years old is really a human being.  
I repeat: all the scientific arguments are against the position of the abortionists and in favor of the pro-life position. If someone wants a practical test of this, then let him simply ask a non-Catholic doctor who has performed an abortion whether what he has extracted from the womb is no more than a thing; or whether it is a living being. And if it is a living being, of what species is it? No - the abortionist position is not based on science or on reason; it is based on prejudices and interests, neither of which have anything very humanitarian about them.

The woman who aborts  
As a priest, I have learned to distinguish between the sin and the sinner. I have also learned that although one can and at times one must judge actions and facts, it is difficult and risky to judge persons. Only God can do that properly. In a moment of temptation, a pregnant woman - who does not want to have her child and decides to abort - can have been swayed by countless factors: factors of personal formation, of influences coming from her environment, her relatives or friends, factors of loneliness, of fear, of nervous strain... We cannot judge the degree of blame that may rest on a woman in such a situation. Only God, I repeat, who takes everything into account, can judge this. We can however judge something else, or at least form a reliable opinion about it, namely, what will become of this woman, in human terms, according to whether or not she repents of what she has done.  
Let us not fool ourselves. The woman who has procured an abortion knows that she has procured the death, the murder, of her own child, the fruit of her own womb. And she lives with a deep wound in her conscience. A permissive society may find no difficulty in forgiving her. The worst of it is that she will not be able to forgive herself, or to forget. And my experience is that in the exceptional cases where a woman does succeed in silencing her conscience, she does so at the cost of moral suicide: she destroys her very conscience and her sense of values, she de-feminizes and de-humanizes her self. Her maternal instinct, in particular, and her whole capacity for loving suffer enormous and irreparable damage.  
The Church never wants to condemn persons. If she condemns sin, if she condemns wrong actions, it is in order to help people have clear ideas, to help them look into their conscience (which, if they have done wrong, will also accuse them), so that, by repenting, they can find pardon and peace. It is those who condone immoral actions who may be condemning a person to a terrible life of mental anguish.

Personalization and depersonalization  
This consideration leads us to touch on another pseudo-argument of the abortionists, according to which the determination that the unborn child is a person should depend not on biological facts, nor even on time-factors (viability or birth), but on a psychological factor. Playing with concepts drawn from modern psychology - concepts that emphasize the importance of intersubjective relationships in the process of "personalization" - some have suggested that the unborn child cannot properly be regarded as a person before it has been accepted by its parents; if this acceptance is lacking - so the argument runs - it cannot be considered a person nor does it possess personal rights.  
This argument runs into the same sort of trouble as the "viability" argument. It "proves" too much. On its basis, neither a one-year-old child nor a five-year-old child would be a person either, if its parents have not "accepted" it. Obviously it is before, and not after, begetting a child that the parents have to decide if they want it or not. Before, the child was a possibility, precisely no more than a potentiality. After, the child is a reality, and that reality is a person just as much as the one-day-old or the one-month-old baby.  
It is a person, who therefore possesses a personality in the fullest human sense, a personality that makes him or her the subject of rights [125].  
There is, of course, an ambiguity in the personalization argument. But it is an ambiguity that, when brought to light, rebounds back against the very proponents of the argument. Evidently, if one asks whether the unborn child has its own "personality" in the popular sense - in the sense of possessing a whole personal manner of being, of thinking and speaking and acting - the answer is No. In this sense the unborn child is not "personalized," nor is the one-day-old, nor the one-month-old child; just as, in this same sense, the three-year-old or the five-year-old child is only very slightly personalized.  
Since "personalization" really means the process of the development of one's individual personality, this is evidently a process that takes years: all the years of one's life, in fact. Only with the years - with all that the years bring in terms of human experience: of generosity or selfishness, of virtues and sins, of learning to respect and love others or of failing to learn to love, of having faced up to one's responsibilities or of having rejected them - does a person develop his or her distinctive personality.

Self-realization for 'liberated" women?  
The personalization argument - which has no application to the case of the unborn child (what personality can be developed by a person who is killed?) - does, however, apply precisely and very clearly to the case of the mother who aborts. For here one can ask, and largely foresee, what sort of personality is going to be developed by a person who kills.Modern psychology insists that men and women "realize" or "fulfill" themselves above all in their relations with other people, and that one of the clearest proofs of the presence or absence of personality is the capacity or incapacity for establishing interpersonal relationships.  
What personality is going to be developed by a woman who, before the most intimate interpersonal relationship imaginable - the relationship between her own person and the person of the child she has conceived; the (truly unique) relationship between her own body and the body of the child in her womb - rejects and destroys that relationship, killing her child and having its body consigned to a hospital incinerator?  
Through what type of later relationships will a woman be able to "realize" herself if her reaction to this sacred mother-child relationship has been to extirpate her most intimate instincts of motherhood and pity from her heart, by extirpating her child from her body?.  
It is sad to see pro-choice propaganda present abortion as a "right" of every woman, claiming this right precisely in the name of women's "liberation." It is sad propaganda that can only turn the women who use this "right" into sad and embittered women. Who is going to liberate them afterward from the awareness of what, in violation of their most intimate human instincts, they have done?  
When the proposal to "liberalize" the abortion law was being debated in England, I recall seeing a television program that included interviews with a series of women who had each had a number of abortions. The interviewer's questions were evidently aimed at "proving" one point: that neither physically nor psychologically had they suffered any adverse effects from the abortions. What the women said, in answer, corroborated the thesis fully. However, I still retain a vivid memory of their hardened faces, their way of answering, their evident concern to justify themselves, their insistence that they had never been troubled by the least feeling of repugnance or remorse, their air of proud and sad loneliness; in a word, the impression of what I have mentioned earlier: a brutal defeminization and dehumanization.  
I would now like to examine two points: two new "indications" or arguments that tend to make ever more frequent appearances in the pro-abortion campaign. I will consider them briefly, not because these arguments are less important - they are very significant and important - but simply because space does not permit any more extensive treatment.

The "eugenic" argument  
The first argument is that of the so-called "eugenic" indication - in other words, the probability (or possibility) that the already conceived child may be born with some physical or mental defect. All modern abortion-law reform includes a clause legalizing an abortion carried out for eugenic reasons. The clause containing the eugenic indication tends to be very short, and many people probably look on it as another indication, more or less of the same order as the others.  
It is no such thing! If the philosophy of life that underlies the other indications is repellent, the ideology underlying this clause is of an infinitely worse order. Let us state it very clearly: this indication is the fruit of no mere selfish hedonism; nor is it the product of an individualistic materialism that has lost its sense of direction and values. By means of this little clause, a clear, powerful, and repugnant philosophy is opening a way for itself - a legal way - into our Western societies. The philosophy, or rather ideology, of this clause is that of racial purity and has little or no essential difference from the Hitlerian ideology. For eugenicism, after all, simply means this: we don't want any inferior stock, we don't want any "substandard" specimens who could disturb the tranquil contemplation of our Brave New World, demanding compassion, appealing for charity or affection, or simply reminding us that there is a God to whom we ought to be grateful for the good things we enjoy.

Lives not worth living  
Let us not forget what this phrase - lives not worth living - means in practice. It means, each time it is applied, that one person or several persons are making the following judgment:  
"In our opinion, this life [and they are speaking of another human being already in existence] is not worth living. It is (or it may later turn out to be) so defective that it is better for it to die now."  
This same judgment, it should be noted, is likewise applied by those who maintain that the fetus is not yet a human person. They are saying: "This life, which - unless we kill it - will develop into a human person, will develop into a human life unworthy of being lived. Therefore, let us kill it."  
The essential and only basis for what we call democratic rights is that every being has inviolable value; and that no one - no State, no authority, no person - can decide that anyone else's life is useless and dispensable.One can make the judgment that someone is living in conditions unworthy of a human being, and then make every effort to remedy those conditions. That is humanitarian.  
What one cannot do, in the name of humanitarianism, is to make the judgment that someone is not worthy to live - even if he may have to live in conditions unworthy of a human being. That is not a humanitarian but a totalitarian judgment. When one makes that judgment, one has put an end to humanitarianism.

Consequences of eugenicism  
The eugenic argument is subject to many further criticisms. I will limit myself to two:  
(1) The prognosis that the child may possibly be born defective cannot be made with absolute certainty. If abortions are performed on this ground, the result will be that in a high percentage of the cases (some estimates say that it could be as high as 50%) quite normal children will be killed. It would be much more logical, from the eugenic viewpoint (and if the eugenicists consider themselves humanitarian, it would also be, for them, much more humanitarian) to let all these pregnancies come to term and, once the children have been born, kill those who in fact prove defective. If anyone says that this would be too repugnant, I could not agree more; but it is the logic of eugenicism that is repugnant.  
(2) If, in virtue of the principle that defective lives are not worth living, it is humane to kill in order to prevent a person being born who may turn out to be defective, it is unquestionably more humane still to kill a person who has already turned out to be defective, to kill a defective person already born whether one day old or one year, or twenty or forty or sixty. And that person can be killed because (it is a point inherent in the same principle) he is not possessed of human life by a sufficiently good title. His physical or mental defect has made his very right to life defective. He can be killed, not perhaps for the "defect" of being a Jew, but for that of being crazy or disabled or chronically ill, or simply aged.  
The acceptance of eugenic abortion means - whether the public at large is aware of the fact or nor - the acceptance not only of the principles underlying euthanasia, but of all that prop up the politics of racial purity: the policy of the elimination of the unfit, of those unworthy of life, of those who do not measure up to the quality standards laid down - by the controllers-that-be - for the human stock.  
But surely - I hear the objection - all of this is rather exaggerated. No. It is not exaggeration. It is simply a projection. It is simply to follow out the logical consequences of the new abortionist philosophies, and to project them on to the practical life of a perhaps not-very-far-off future.  
Tomorrow's world will be the product of the tendencies and ideologies that have prevailed in the world of today. What will that world be like? It is something to think about, while there is still time to think. This is not the moment to play the ostrich, burying our heads in the sand. It is an elementary responsibility to read the signs of the times, to see where a large part of our civilization is heading, and to ask ourselves if we too want to go there. To prefer not to ask oneself the question is the surest way of finding oneself eventually dragged in that very direction.  
Excommunicating oneself from humanity...  
Thus we are led to a conclusion that needs to be emphatically stated. Abortion - tolerated or legalized; looked on with indifference or with approval - represents an extreme of barbarity that is hard to surpass. One could well see in it a symbol of how our civilization seems bent on destroying the very seeds of survival that it bears within itself.  
It is understandable that the Church should wish to emphasize the gravity of this "abominable crime" by decreeing an ipso facto excommunication not only for the woman who seeks an abortion, but for all who effectively procure it (Code of Canon Law; canon 1398).  
An abortionist - again I am thinking above all of those who try to justify this crime - excommunicates himself from the most elementary human community, the community of those who strive to respect the human rights of others, whatever their religion, race, color, social position, state of physical or mental health, or age.

The demographic argument  
The second new argument that is used to support abortion is the demographic argument. There are already countries where abortion is imposed as a means of demographic control. Elsewhere, for the moment, the matter rather works the other way around; that is, the constant propaganda about overpopulation acts as a factor in favor of abortion. As public opinion is "mentalized" so as to think that it is not quite right to have more than one or two children, that not to do so is an urgent and imperative duty, that its non-observance must be regarded, initially, as a total lack of responsibility and next, as a flagrant crime against society ... then it becomes progressively easier to persuade the public that abortion is not a crime at all; that, far from being a crime, it may he the best and most appropriate means to get people to fulfill a strict duty.  
It is logical that those to whom this "argument" appeals should be attracted also by the fact that abortion is, without the slightest doubt, the most effective means to check population growth. It requires no exceptional degree of intelligence to figure out that the best means to ensure that there is no excess population is to kill the "surplus". This, in all its true crudeness, is the way of thinking among some people, although they do not - as yet - dare to present it quite so bluntly. But it is as blunt as that; so much so that one could well ask those who think this way to explain if there is any real difference, as a means to their end, between the scalpel and the machine-gun.

**NOTES**  
[1] The first significant change in the Protestant judgment on contraception was at the Lambeth Conference of 1929.  
[2] John Paul II, Familiaris consortio, no. 11.  
[3] This is especially true if one emphasizes feminine roles, even if - as I wish - to admire them.  
[4] always bearing in mind that "God transcends the human distinction between the sexes. He is neither man nor woman. He is God": The Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 239.  
[5] Ibid. no. 369.  
[6] The Theology of the Body, Pauline Books, Boston, 1997, p. 48.  
[7] Our Lord's words, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35), mark a law for human development and happiness. It is more important to give than to take. Growth in humanity - humanization of individuals or of society - depends on one's capacity for giving and on the actual giving each one makes. Sexual situations should be filled with demands on our capacity for giving. The problem with sexuality in its present condition is that it is a force more inclined to take and less inclined to give. Sexual education or formation must tend towards motivating people to respond nobly to the challenges of giving which are present in the various sexually-differentiated situations that characterize life, and to resist the urges of selfishness that they can also provoke; and to understand when and how - to what degree and in what way - one can take from what sex has to offer, and so be fulfilled by it.  
[8] "It is commonly thought that women are more capable than men of paying attention to another person": John Paul II: Mulieris dignitatem, 18.  
[9] See Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 239. In passing, note the special weakness of the one-parent family where children miss the experience of learning to relate to father and to mother and of perceiving the difference.  
[10] A reference might be made here to the interplay of logic and intuition. Men are said to be more logical (although I know many men who would seem to disprove the assertion), while woman generally have higher gifts of intuition. Neither logic nor intuition should be confused with intelligence, although each can lead to an understanding of persons or situations. While it is easier to be logical than to be properly intuitive, we should all try to be both and to combine the resources of both. In many optimal family situations, one sees an effective interplay between the two. It is necessary to be logical, but it is even more important to have a grasp of the human factors involved. Family situations in particular are seldom well solved by mere logic; intuition often fills in the gaps, so as thus to arrive at a deeper intelligence.  
[11] Motherhood "involves a special 'gift of self' on the woman's part", and so a mother has special "joy and awareness that she is sharing in the great mystery of eternal generation": Mulieris dignitatem, 18.  
[12] These points and those of the preceding section help to underline the grave handicap the civil law inflicts on children if it allows their adoption by a homosexual couple. As the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith remarked in 2003: "the absence of sexual complementarity in these unions creates obstacles in the normal development of children who would be placed in the care of such persons. They would be deprived of the experience of either fatherhood or motherhood" (Considerations Regarding Proposals to Give Legal Recognition to Unions Between Homosexual Persons).  
[13] cf. A. Sicari: "The family: A place of fraternity" Communio 20 (1993), p. 303.  
[14] Only a philosophy of self-sufficiency - which is destructive of inter-personal relations, of affection, of family, of society - denies inter-dependence, in the various modes and expressions it can take.  
[15] It is through a process of discovering that one cannot always have one's own way, however much one wants to, a process of having quarrels, making up, giving and taking, that a child gradually learns to share, and so to be a friend, and to make and keep friends.  
[16] The Harry Potter series points up a lot of this. At the start Harry, Ron, and Hermione are particular friends. Two boys who "share" the same girl-friend; and one girl who has two boy-friends. Of course, later in the series the relationship changes.  
[17] Persons are not meant to be used but to be loved or at least respected; sexual use is one of the worst modes and quickest ways of degrading personal relations.  
[18] It is true today that we have become prodigal in kissing almost everyone, even complete strangers. It is also true that signs of affection, once overdone, become banalized. The indiscriminate giving to everyone of very special signs of affection, is either of saints or of people with a superficial sense of human relations.  
[19] For a fuller analysis of this, see chapter 8.  
[20] The latter is what shows a real union between persons. Whoever reduces the sexual relationship to a union of bodies without a union of souls will never marry - or will fail in marriage - , for marriage can only be properly understood and successfully undertaken precisely as a joining of two separate persons in a unity of mutual self-giving, dependence and common undertaking.  
[21] "the desire to use another person is fundamentally incompatible with love": Karol Wojtyla: Love and Responsibility, p. 124; "There is a fundamental contradiction between 'loving' and 'using' a person" ibid. p. 231.  
[22] "Love consists of a commitment which limits one's freedom - it is a giving of the self, and to give oneself means just that: to limit one's freedom on behalf of another. Limitation of one's freedom might seem to be something negative and unpleasant, but love makes it a positive, joyful and creative thing. Freedom exists for the sake of love. If freedom is not used, is not taken advantage of by love, it becomes a negative thing and gives human beings a feeling of emptiness and unfulfilment" K. Wojtyla: Love and Responsibility, 135.  
[23] Psychiatric studies show that the choice to live together, instead of marrying, easily induces deep-rooted anxiety and insecurity: for example, see Nadelson-Notman: "To Marry or Not to Marry: a Choice": American Journal of Psychiatry, 138 (1981), p. 1354.  
[24] Karol Wojtyla: Love and Responsibility, 83.  
[25] cf. C. Burke: "A Postscript to the 'Remedium Concupiscentiae'", The Thomist 70 (2006): 481-536.  
[26] see below, Ch. 8.  
[27] cf. "A Postscript...", p. 525-529.  
[28] that is, gathered together into one single body or Code. Up to 1917 ecclesiastical law had been scattered among many legislative decrees and other documents.  
[29] On promulgating the Code in 1983, Pope John Paul II referred to it as the "last document of the Second Vatican Council" (AAS 76 (1984) 644).  
[30] cf. Is 55:3, Jer 31:31-33, Ez 16:8, 60; 37:26, Dan 9:4, Mal 2:14.  
[31] This strikingly new way of describing marital consent is now firmly established in magisterial teaching. So the 1994 Catechism of the Catholic Church says that the consent "by which the spouses mutually give and receive one another is sealed by God himself" ( 1639).  
[32] Mt 16:24-25; cf. Mk 8:34-35; Lk 9:23-24.  
[33] cf. Humanae vitae, no. 9; Familiaris consortio, no. 13; Mulieris dignitatem, no. 7, etc.  
[34] bearing in mind that the idea of "giving oneself" cannot cover absolutely every aspect of one's person (personal responsibility, for instance, always remains inalienable). The gift, the mutual self-donation, involved is rather the fullness of complementary conjugal sexuality.  
[35] It also held that there is no essential interconnection between these two ends. Hence the conjugal act retains its full meaning as an expression of marital love, even if its procreative potential is deliberately nullified. This thesis (which of course underpins the whole contraceptive movement) was to be expressly rejected by the teaching of Humanae vitae in 1968. Chapter 8 will look further into this and try to show the deep human logic to Pope Paul VI's teaching.  
[36] We have studied this at length in several places: "Personalism and the bona of Marriage": Studia canonica 27 (1993), 401-412; "Marriage: a personalist focus on indissolubility": Linacre Quarterly, vol. 61 (1994), pp. 48-56; "The Object of Matrimonial Consent: a Personalist Analysis": Forum 9 (1998)1: pp. 39-117.  
[37] c. 1055, 1. The expression "is of its own very nature ordered to" is equivalent to "has as its ends". This is made clear in the 1994 Catechism: no. 1660 repeats the formula of canon 1055 which is summed up in no. 2363 in the words: "the twofold end of marriage".  
[38] In magisterial thinking this distinction was not as longstanding as might be thought. The first official church document in which it appeared is in fact the 1917 Code.  
[39] Gaudium et spes, no. 48.  
[40] Ordo Celebrandi Matrimonium, 25.  
[41] cf. C. Burke: "Personalism and the bona of Marriage", op. cit., pp. 411-412.  
[42] General Audience, April 21, 1982.  
[43] Summa Theol. I, q. 100, art. 2.  
[44] Veritatis splendor, chap. I: "What good must I do?"  
[45] David Copperfield, ch. 44.  
[46] In consequence, "legal recognition of homosexual unions or placing them on the same level as marriage would mean not only the approval of deviant behavior, with the consequence of making it a model in present-day society, but would also obscure basic values which belong to the common inheritance of humanity": Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith: "Considerations Regarding Proposals to Give Legal Recognition to Unions Between Homosexual Persons" 2003.  
[47] "Our faith is decisively opposed to the attitude of resignation that considers man incapable of truth - as if this were more than he could cope with. This attitude of resignation with regard to truth, I am convinced, lies at the heart of the crisis of the West, the crisis of Europe. If truth does not exist for man, then neither can he ultimately distinguish between good and evil": Benedict XVI: Homily, Austria, Sept 8, 2007.  
[48] Without knowing and respecting the harmony between the natural ends or purposes of marriage, it becomes well-nigh impossible to achieve the natural happiness that marriage promises. The crisis into which marriage has plunged in modern times is largely the consequence of seeking happiness without understanding or without accepting these ends.  
[49] Only in truly exceptional cases can marriage work well without children, without the children that God wants for each individual marriage. It is of course possible that God may not want any children for a particular marriage, even though husband and wife may be anxious to have a family. These (materially) sterile unions can be happy if they accept God's will. They will receive special graces from him to learn to love one another more and more as each day passes. And they can, and indeed should, achieve a spiritual fruitfulness by devoting the time and energy that would have gone to their children to formative and apostolic activities in favor of others.  
[50] Gaudium et spes, no. 50.  
[51] "Man cannot attain that true happiness for which he yearns with all the strength of his spirit, unless he keeps the laws which the Most High God has engraved in his very nature. These laws must be wisely and lovingly observed": Humanae vitae, 31.  
[52] Gaudium et spes, 48.  
[53] Jacques Leclercq, Le mariage chrétien, Casterman, Ch 2.  
[54] ib. ch. 5.  
[55] Leclercq, Ch 6.  
[56] ibid.  
[57] Humanae vitae, 9.  
[58] Leclercq, op. cit. ch. 5.  
[59] cfr. Council of Trent, Session 24, can. 5; Vatican Council II, Gaudium et spes, 48-50.  
[60] Collier's Encyclopedia, Vol. 8, p. 281 (1968 Edition).  
[61] National Center for Health Statistics, Washington, D.C.  
[62] In fact, if two people got on "happily" in marriage, without ever having had to make any real effort at it, their marriage - however "happy" (and it would, I think, be a mediocre happiness) - would not have been a successful marriage: for it would not have succeeded in maturing them as persons.  
[63] Even to love God, who has no defects, is hard; because although He has no defects, we have. Each one of us finds it difficult to come out of self and to give ourself to another - which is what love implies. We find that difficult even when the Other is perfect. When the other is not perfect, as occurs in all purely human relations - marriage included - , it is harder still.  
[64] If it were human nature always to "feel in love", then there would be no need for a law of indissolubility... In this sense, it is precisely for those who no longer feel in love that the law is meant!  
[65] Newsweek, Feb. 13, 1967.  
[66] St. Thomas Aquinas remarks: "jealousy of the husband towards his wife, and of the wife towards her husband, is natural; for it is to be found in everyone" (Suppl. q. 65, art. 1).  
[67] This idea - that a new marriage will enable the children to refind a father or a mother's love - far from being an argument in favor of divorce, points up one of the worst effects of remarriage. It may well be, for instance, that their mother no longer loves their father, and feels she loves another man instead. But only an extreme of selfishness or of psychological blindness can lead her to think that her children can - or should - make such an easy transfer of natural and deeply rooted affections. The mere wish - let alone the attempt - to get them to transfer their filial love to a substitute parent, thereby rejecting their real father or mother, can produce very serious psychological consequences.  
[68] Therefore couples who deliberately remain childless, so that they can enjoy each other's love more, are leaving that love defenseless against the inevitable onset of selfishness.  
[69] This whole subject is studied in depth and in a broad context in my book, Man and Values, Scepter Press, 2007.  
[70] See Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1607.  
[71] See chapter 15.  
[72] Married couples "have need of the grace of God.... Without this help, man and woman cannot achieve that union of their lives for which God created them at the beginning": Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1608.  
[73] cf. The Forge, Scepter Press, New York, no. 28.  
[74] cf. Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church (2005), no. 498.  
[75] We are obviously not speaking here of the gift of self that a person may make to God.  
[76] "Seed" is here intended to refer equally to the male or the female generative element.  
[77] In this way, in fact, the uniqueness of the decision to marry a particular person is reaffirmed in each marital act. By every single act of true intercourse, each spouse is confirmed in the unique status of being husband or wife to the other.  
[78] The "language of the body" is of course a key expression in Pope John Paul II's writings on sexuality and marriage.  
[79] "Contraception falsifies the inner truth of conjugal love", John Paul II, Familaris consortio, 32.  
[80] This still is true even in cases where, for some reason or another, the spouses cannot have children. Their union in such cases, just as their union during the wife's pregnancy, draws its deepest meaning from the fact that both their conjugal act and the intention behind it are "open to life", even though no life can actually result from the act. It is their basic openness to life which gives the act its meaning and dignity; just as the absence of this openness is what undermines the dignity and meaning of the act when the spouses, without serious reasons, deliberately limit their marital intercourse to the infertile periods.  
[81] Obviously we are not referring here to those occasions in which, out of justice to a third party, one of the spouses is under an obligation to observe some secret, for example, of a professional nature. Fulfilment of such an obligation is in no way a violation of the rights of married intimacy.  
[82] If it is not sexuality that each spouse in contraceptive intercourse gives to or takes from the other, what does each one in fact actually take or give? In what might be termed the better cases, it is a form of love - divorced from sexuality. In other cases, it is merely pleasure, also - be it noted - divorced from sexuality. In one case or the other, contraceptive spouses always deny themselves sexuality. Their marriage, deprived of a true sexual relationship, suffers in consequence.  
[83] General Audience, November 21, 1979.  
[84] though we have referred in passing to those richly suggestive biblical passages which speak of how the spouses in conjugal sexual intercourse "know each other" and become "one flesh".  
[85] I know an African family with eighteen children and no car, and an American "family" (if it can be called that) with eighteen cars and no children. And I honestly think that the African family is much happier: about eighteen times as much.  
[86] John Paul II, Familiaris consortio, no. 34.  
[87] The love of naturally barren couples, to whom God does not give children, should of course also grow; but it too needs dedication to others, if it is to do so.  
[88] By one or two children perhaps; or perhaps by five or six. It is only God who knows the measure of support each marriage requires. Hence the vital need for spouses, if they are to resolve the matter successfully and happily, to approach it prayerfully.  
[89] Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II, II, 2 (1979), p. 702.  
[90] On the Scope and Nature of University Education, Discourse IV.  
[91] There was a Babe born once in Bethlehem and nothing was or is better than that Babe, who shares his goodness with each baby born, and would have wished to share it with many who have not been and never will be born.  
[92] Another African footnote. Disconcerted by Planned Parenthood arguments, a Kenyan remarked: "Traditionally if the neighbors' cow gave birth to a calf, one congratulated the family, because their standard of life had increased. Nowadays if the wife gives birth to a child, one is apparently supposed to sympathize with them, because their standard of life has gone down... I have to figure that one out".  
[93] Gaudium et spes, no. 48.  
[94] How clear, directed to both parents and children, are the words of Pope Benedict XVI: "the family comes into being from the responsible and definitive 'yes' of a man and a women, and it continues to live from the conscious 'yes' of the children who gradually join it. The family community, in order to prosper, needs the generous consent of all its members" (Message: World Day of Peace, 2008, no. 6).  
[95] Josemaría Escrivá: Christ is Passing By, no. 114.  
[96] St. Josemaria Escrivá insisted time and again on the inseparable harmony that should exist between "individual freedom and the personal responsibility that must always go with it" (Christ is Passing By, no. 184; cf. Conversations with Msgr. Escrivá. no. 100).  
[97] Christ is Passing By, no. 28.  
[98] If the passage of the years is not to undermine married happiness, each of the partners needs to keep on seeing some ideal aspect in the other. Yet it is obvious that no man, and no woman, can remain indefinitely the perfect ideal for the other. He or she has too many defects, and sooner or later these defects are going to be discovered. Nevertheless, even though it is inevitable that the partners in marriage discover each other's defects, this should not necessarily lead to the collapse of their ideal of love. It will modify it, in the sense that they will come to the recognition that only God is perfect. But, defects and all, husband or wife should continue to be the ideal for their partner. The real danger here come from pride. Pride tends to blind us to our own defects, and to make us much too sharp-sighted as to the defects of others. Similarly it makes us more aware of our own virtues and blinds us to the virtues of others. If husband and wife are to keep up their ideal love for one another, if they are to love each other more and more as time passes, then they need, with God's grace, to learn to be humble. Humility will make each one more aware of his or her own defects than of those of their partner. At the same time it will make them regard their partner's virtues or good points as greater and more important than any they themselves may possess. This is the only way that each of them can remain convinced that they are enjoying a love of which they are not worthy. This ideal they were looking for in their marriage will remain standing.  
[99] Journal, III, 214-215.  
[100] And how about the lives of the saints, both men and women? Terrific reading, certainly, for adolescents - up to perhaps eleven or twelve years old. If after that it is more difficult to find lives of saints capable of capturing the interest and enthusiasm of adolescents, the fault must be laid at the door not of the saints but of their biographers. Most of these move around in a sort of disincarnated supernatural world and seem incapable of pointing up the natural virtues and the humanly attractive and moving aspects of these heroes. But there are signs that things are improving in this area.  
[101] See Josemaria Escrivá, The Way, no. 88.  
[102] "We see clear signs of a disturbing breakdown in the very foundations of society: signs of alienation, anger and polarization on the part of many of our contemporaries; increased violence; a weakening of the moral sense; a coarsening of social relations; and a growing forgetfulness of Christ and God". Benedict XVI: Homily, Washington, D.C., April 17, 2008.  
[103] Even within marriage its use - if it is to remain noble and at the service of love - requires control and restraint. Where that restraint is lacking, sex, far from serving or fostering love, tends to destroy it; for, rather than love, it expresses self-seeking.  
[104] We leave aside the question of drugs.  
[105] Of course, some will reject the concept of sex-addiction, or the idea that it corrupts or enslaves. This is like the drug-addict or alcoholic who says he is not addicted; that he just likes drink or drugs. [ would not argue with him. What he needs is help. But if he won't acknowledge his need he won't let himself be helped. Alcoholics Anonymous have spelled out this truth of life very clearly.  
Others would even say that if people prefer pornography, they are not really being exploited: they are getting what they choose. Certainly; but what they choose is exploitation, even if, perhaps, they don't see it. A large part of the exploitation lies precisely in manipulating the exploited into the idea that they are choosing freedom when in fact they are choosing slavery. Once the pornographer puts up signs outside his establishment saying "Slave shop"; "We offer slavery: attractive, indeed captivating, but slavery" - then, though we may still call him an exploiter, we will no longer have to call him a hypocrite. In the same way as marxists must be called hypocrites for so long as they continue to manipulate the term "democracy". Can anything less democratic be imagined than marxist philosophy or tactics, or than a Communist State? We should therefore keep calling Marxists hypocrites until they stop calling themselves democrats. Once the Marxists cease to talk about democracy and say clearly: "What we offer is an earthly paradise where men will be born, reared, fed, put to work, made socially useful, and eventually hygienically buried and entirely forgotten, under the dictatorial control of a one-party State, where each one will be treated at all times as a strict economic unit and nothing more, where elementary material needs will be cared for, but where not the least vestige of personal or political freedom will remain...", when the Communists say this, then we will continue to say that their programs are as mistaken and as hollow as ever, but we will no longer have to say that they are insincere. So with the pornographers.  
One stage worse than the blind leading the blind is the blind fooling the blind: the blind blinding the blind... The fact is that no one is qualified to speak about sex unless he acknowledges its contradictions: its noble function, if integrated into God's plans, but also its potential, if uncontrolled or exploited, for making slaves. Writers, artists, film producers, magazine editors, advertisers, today know well this potential and the profit it brings them. The problem is that their public often refuses to acknowledge it.  
[106] And, since God's will is that we should be happy (his will is our happiness), if we do contravene it, we will not be happy.  
[107] After all, if a man is not in control of himself, he can be pretty sure that he is being controlled by someone else. This control or manipulation of the many by the few, especially through the medium of sex, covers much wider fields and interests than might be at first imagined. We have spoken of the commercial pornographer who peddles pornography, and of his interest in breaking down the sales resistance of his potential clients. Let us not think, however, that he is the only one with a clear interest in promoting pornography. There have been recent developments in the commercial world in general which are significant. The use of a certain element of "sex appeal" in ordinary advertising has been a normal matter to which no one has ever dreamed of objecting: pretty faces smilingly decorated ads for stage-coach trips in the nineteenth century and smilingly decorate ads for airlines trips in more recent times. Over the past couple of decades, however, this has degenerated in many cases into progressive and downright pornography. Why? If the degeneration is due to thoughtlessness on the part of the firms concerned (their simply letting themselves unwittingly used by elements within the advertising profession), their witlessness is truly appalling. The possibility remains that it is in fact a result of deliberate policy; that certain manufacturers realise that it is easier to sell (anything) to people without self-control, and so they favour whatever breaks down that control. It is not a pleasant possibility. One cannot easily exclude the same unpleasant possibility from the sphere of politics. When one looks at certain political programmes which favor liberalization of censorship laws, for example, one wonders if the master thought in the mind of the "liberal" politicians who sponsor these policies could not be that they have a double manipulatory effect: they are vote-catching (people easily fall for the promise of easy freedom) and (so at least some people believe) they make for an enervated and therefore easily governed population. Some liberal politicians are well aware (even if their voters are not) that the permissive societies they are brain-childing are becoming more and more like Huxley's planned and totally manipulated Brave New World. They have even outdone Huxley's World Controllers in maintaining the fiction of freedom. The fact that they are wrong about such a liberalised society being more easily controllable (at least by democratic means); the fact that such societies inevitably lead to growing social violence and anarchy, and that in the end they can only be governed by sheer police force, merely underlines the ultimate purpose of these policies - calcul ated, as they are, to destroy the very humanity of people's lives.  
[108] The Pope in the same passage lists some of the major distortions that can be found in such a society: "In the context of a civilization of use, woman can become an object for man, children a hindrance to parents, the family an institution obstructing the freedom of its members".  
[109] The reason why our relation with persons is so much more important than our relation with things, is that one can love persons and be loved by persons, while one cannot have a true love for things, and certainly cannot be loved by them.  
[110] The Pope's Letter is not just about the family; it is first about man. Modern man, the Pope says, does not really know himself: despite "great progress in understanding both the material world and human psychology", man today has largely lost the awareness of what he really is, and so "remains to a great extent a being unknown to himself" (no. 19). All around, one can see this loss of the sense of human identity - of what one is; what one's purpose in life is; whether one is free or not; and if one is free, whether any purpose or responsibility accompanies one's freedom; whether one is autonomous and self-sufficient, or rather made for others or for the State; what sex is about, what sexual identity means; whether therefore marriage and the family have any meaning, and so forth.  
[111] "In the face of the so-called culture of death, the family is the heart of the culture of life": Centesimus Annus, 39.  
[112] Letter, no. 15; cf. Christifideles Laici: the family has the "task of being the primary place of 'humanization' for the person and society" (40).  
[113] no. 14. Benedict XVI says that, if love is true, "in drawing near to the other, it is less and less concerned with itself, increasingly seeks the happiness of the other, is concerned more and more with the beloved, bestows itself and wants to 'be there for' the other" (Deus Caritas Est, no. 7)  
[114] Registro Histórico del Fundador, Rome, arch. 20,770, p. 83.  
[115] Registro... 20,584, p. 177.  
[116] Registro... 20,159, p. 108.  
[117] Christ is Passing By, no. 24.  
[118] Registro... 20,159, p. 108.  
[119] Registro... 20,770, p. 108.  
[120] The Prisoner of Azkaban, p. 140.  
[121] Summa Th. I, q. 100, art. 2.  
[122] Maisie Ward: G.K. Chesterton, London 1944, p. 11.  
[123] The Autobiography of G.K. Chesterton. Sheed and Ward, 1936, p. 36.  
[124] Some medieval theologians took a Scholastic philosophical principle, that the soul is the "substantial form" of the body, as basis for a theory of "retarded animation," according to which the fetus has at first no more than an animal or vegetable soul, and that a rational and human soul is infused only when it is sufficiently developed and can represent an adequate "receptacle" for this substantial form. With such a theory, it was impossible to assign other than a quite arbitrary moment for "animation" which is what some Scholastics in fact did (some said 40, others said 80 days after conception). Modern embryology has helped in the rejection of this theory and in the return to the earlier position (held, for instance, by such Fathers of the Church as St. Basil and St. Gregory Nazianzen) that the rational soul is present from the moment of conception. As can be seen, philosophy owes a debt to physiology in reaching a scientific understanding of the stage at which the human organism in fundamentally constituted, namely, the basis stage of fertilization, at which therefore it can receive its "substantial form".  
[125] We might note here that to the arguments given earlier taken from embryology, we can add an argument taken from juridical science. All ancient and modern jurisprudences attribute to the unborn child full juridical personality, expressed, for example, in the child's capacity to inherit or be the beneficiary of a will.