

# *The Splendor of Love*



A PASTORAL LETTER FROM  
**MOST REVEREND SAMUEL J. AQUILA, S.T.L.**  
FEBRUARY 2, 2018



# Overview

## *Introduction*

The Church's teaching on sexuality is a light in the darkness that brings joy to those who live it out.

## *Part 1*

### **Light and Darkness through the Last Fifty Years**

The last 50 years since the publication of *Humanae Vitae* have brought with them both positive and negative developments in the understanding of human sexuality and marriage.

## *Part 2*

### **The Goodness of Sexuality: The Dignity of the Person**

God imbued our sexuality with truths that are beautiful and when these are followed they allow us to serve as reflections of God's own love, conferring on us a great dignity.

## *Part 3*

### **Proclaiming the Splendor of God's Love**

Every Catholic is called to share the liberating truth of God's plan for sexuality, no matter their state in life or profession. The world and its families need this witness to find lasting happiness.

## *Conclusion*

The 50th anniversary of *Humanae Vitae* is an occasion to celebrate the gift of Blessed Paul VI's teaching and an opportunity to renew our commitment to sharing this liberating truth with a world that is increasingly confused about sexuality.

---

# The Splendor of Love

1. The splendor of love shines forth in the world from the birth of Christ. The voices of the prophets were fulfilled and through his coming into the world, the love of God became incarnate and continues to illuminate our lives, radiating through our families and into society. This eternal love is what holds us in existence and gives meaning to our lives, and it finds its most important home in marriage and family life. This is the “love that moves the sun and the other stars.”<sup>1</sup>

2. July 25, 2018 will mark the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of Blessed Pope Paul VI’s encyclical, *Humanae Vitae*, in 1968. He prophetically defended the integrity of married love and warned us against the danger of reducing sexuality to a source of pleasure alone. Married love reflects the love of Christ, the love which caused him to become human to save us and to give his life for his Church. Married love, “from the beginning” is also by nature fruitful, bringing new life into the world so that we can participate in the gift of God’s own creation.

3. Responding to *Humanae Vitae* and the teaching contained in St. John Paul’s *Theology of the Body*, when I became bishop of Fargo, North Dakota, I instructed engaged couples that they had to complete the full course of Natural Family Planning (NFP) training for their marriage preparation, and I have done the same in the Archdiocese of Denver. Certainly, there were naysayers: however, a letter I received from a young woman convinced me of the wisdom of requiring the full course. She wrote:

*I am writing to you today to thank you and to ask you a question. I have never met you. When I was told that we would have to take a full course of NFP over a 3-4-month period for our marriage preparation, I was not happy. However, after the course, which included the Theology of the Body, I was filled with joy and the question I have for you, bishop, is: Why I did not receive this valuable teaching in high school as it would have saved me much heartache and confusion in my college years. I have shared the teaching with my younger sister who is in high school so she doesn’t make the same mistakes I made.*

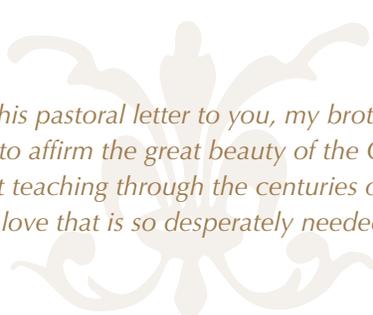
Like the Samaritan woman, when this young woman encountered Jesus and the truths she learned in her NFP instruction, her heart was changed and she became a missionary announcing the joy of the Gospel.

4. Those married couples who teach NFP are a great gift to the Church, for they do what most priests and bishops cannot do when it comes to teaching the truth on human sexuality, marriage, and NFP. They teach from their lived experience of the sacrament of marriage and their encounter with Jesus, putting into practice Pope Francis’ consistent call for accompaniment of engaged and newly married couples.

1 Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, Paradise, XXXIII.

5. I write this pastoral letter to you, my brothers and sisters, to affirm the great beauty of the Church's consistent teaching through the centuries on married love, a love that is so desperately needed today. I write it in gratitude to the Father for the teaching of *Humanae Vitae*, the gift of St. John Paul II's Theology of the Body, the priests and deacons who prepare couples for marriage, and most especially, for the numerous couples dedicated to teaching NFP and marriage preparation who are true missionaries in the world helping others encounter Jesus and the truth of married love and human sexual intimacy.

6. Defending this love in our culture requires a strong commitment. Indeed, Sr. Lucia, one of the visionaries from Our Lady's apparition at Fatima, related that a "decisive battle between the kingdom of Christ and Satan will be over marriage and the family."<sup>2</sup> The family is the foundation of society, and when it is undermined, society itself is threatened with collapse. Therefore, it is crucial to reaffirm our commitment to the truth, goodness, and beauty of Christ's teaching on marriage and sexuality.



*I write this pastoral letter to you, my brothers and sisters, to affirm the great beauty of the Church's consistent teaching through the centuries on married love, a love that is so desperately needed today.*

2 English language summary of original interview retrieved on 01/02/18, *Fatima visionary predicted 'final battle' would be over marriage, family*.



# Part 1

## *Light and Darkness through the Last Fifty Years*

7. The 50 years since *Humanae Vitae* was published have brought with them both goodness and the distortions of the truth about sexuality. Despite these lies, the Church has continued to illuminate the world with the good news that human love finds its ultimate meaning and splendor in God's own particular love for every human being.

### *Positive Developments*

8. Pope Saint John Paul II has deepened our understanding of the great gift of human sexuality, which requires nothing less from us than a complete gift of self. In his reflections on the theology of the body, he teaches us that "The human body includes right from the beginning ... the capacity of expressing love, that love in which the person becomes a gift – and by means of this gift – fulfills the meaning of his being and existence."<sup>3</sup>

9. One of the false narratives that has been advanced today is that there is a competition or tension between romantic love (*eros*) and charity, or self-giving love. However, as Pope Benedict XVI has shown us, the astonishing truth is that human love and sexuality teach us about God's own love.

*From the standpoint of creation, eros directs man towards marriage, to a bond which is unique and definitive; thus, and only thus, does it fulfill its deepest purpose. Corresponding to the image of a monotheistic God is monogamous marriage. 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.*<sup>4</sup>

10. Pope Francis has emphasized the importance of fostering a culture of encounter within the family, so that the deeply social character of marriage is supported and spreads to society at large.

3 St. John Paul II, Wednesday audience catechesis from January 16, 1980.

4 Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, 11.

Families should not see themselves as a refuge from society, but instead go forth from their homes in a spirit of solidarity with others. In this way, they become a hub for integrating persons into society and a point of contact between the public and private spheres. Married couples should have a clear awareness of their social obligations. With this, their affection does not diminish but is flooded with new light.<sup>5</sup>

*11.* We have likewise seen great advancements in Natural Family Planning, as couples have embraced God's beautiful and sometimes challenging plan for their married life. I am particularly encouraged to hear stories from around the archdiocese about how this is happening. One of our NFP instructors shared with me that she was working with an engaged woman who was adamant about remaining on the birth control pill and said she was only taking the NFP course because it was a part of marriage preparation. The instructor related what happened next:

*We met every two weeks and the woman was faithfully making her observations, but there was nothing on her chart. This bothered her. She asked me, "Is this normal to not see anything?" I responded, "No, that's not normal. The birth control pill suppresses these signs – suppresses your fertility, so there isn't much to see." They wanted to know what their fertility looked like. She wanted to know if she was healthy and could have children. This didn't bother them before they started charting. After a few meetings, they came to the appointment and stated, "We've decided to stop the birth control pill and use NFP when we are married."*<sup>6</sup>

In similar ways, Catholics have given witness to the blessing that comes from God's plan for marriage, even as this plan has become obscured and undermined in our laws.

<sup>5</sup> Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 181 and §182-184.

<sup>6</sup> Archdiocese of Denver Office of Marriage and Family Life, November 2017 testimony.

## Negative Developments

**12.** While the Church has striven to deepen its teaching and witness to God's design for the gift of our sexuality, the last 50 years of widespread contraceptive use have also brought disturbing developments, many of which were prophetically spoken by Blessed Paul VI in *Humanae Vitae*. First, he warned that contraception would "open wide the way for conjugal infidelity and a general lowering of moral standards."<sup>7</sup> In particular, he warned that contraception could lead men to "forget the reverence due to a woman, and, disregarding her physical and emotional equilibrium, reduce her to being a mere instrument for the satisfaction of his own desires, no longer considering her as his partner whom he should surround with care and affection."<sup>8</sup> Finally, he warned that contraceptives would allow governments "to intervene in the most personal and intimate responsibility of husband and wife," and even to "impose their use on everyone."<sup>9</sup>

Unfortunately, Blessed Paul VI's prophecies have all come true. While advocates of contraception predicted that divorce rates and abortions would decrease with its use, they skyrocketed. Women have also greatly suffered from objectification, which is found in advertising and movies, but also takes on more extreme forms like pornography and sex trafficking. The Holy Father's expectation that governments would impose contraception on people most recently came to fruition in the Obama administration's Health and Human Services contraception mandate, but has also appeared in American and European government programs that provide contraception in developing countries.

While the 1968 reception of *Humanae Vitae* was mixed, the fulfillment of Blessed Paul VI's prophetic wisdom is undeniable and points to the truth of the teaching contained in *Humanae Vitae*. Furthermore, those communities of faith which have gone the way of the world in their teaching on human sexuality have not filled their churches but only emptied them. As Jesus made clear in the Gospel, apart from him and his life-giving teachings, we cannot bear fruit.<sup>10</sup>

**13.** We have also seen new and unique challenges arise, of which Blessed Paul VI could not have even dreamed. Rejecting the true nature of the sexual act has not led to increased happiness and fulfillment but to a distortion of the relationship between men and women. The effects of the sexual revolution have devastated our culture: large numbers of abortions, a sharp rise in STDs, divorce rates hovering near 50 percent, birth rates falling below replacement level, and a decline in people getting married.

The widespread use of pornography has also trivialized love and made sex "cheap," in that it no longer requires a strong and lasting commitment to the other.<sup>11</sup> With the dominance of pornography, we now also see a decline in a rightly ordered sex drive, with a loss of libido and even a movement towards intercourse with robots, as reported in the media.

**14.** Technology now dominates sexuality and has also damaged the planet. For instance, the predominant use of the pill, and endocrine-disrupting chemicals found in plastics and other products have flooded our water supplies with synthetic estrogens and endocrine-disrupting chemicals, causing a rise in infertility, an increased risk of cancer and hormon-

<sup>7</sup> Pope Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae*, 1968, par. 17.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> John 15.

<sup>11</sup> See Mark Regnerus, *Cheap Sex: The Transformation of Men, Marriage, and Monogamy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

al changes for our children.<sup>12</sup> It has also become common for children to be conceived outside of marriage, violating their right to be conceived within an act of love between their natural father and mother.

**15.** The greatest tragedy today facing the family may be the unwillingness of many to enter married love and to experience the joys of family life. Our very concept of marriage has changed, shaped by an individualistic worldview that is centered on self-fulfillment. Until recently, marriage had been understood by our society to be a complete gift of self, between a man and woman, which involved being bound by a covenant vow to another person for life and included fidelity and the gift of children. We still use the words “for better, for worse,” though they have been emptied of meaning. Now, marriage has become a means of personal fulfillment that lasts only if it pleases both parties. Sex itself has been changed from a gift and source of life in the family to a means of pleasure and self-satisfaction.

**16.** Once sex and marriage has been redefined and trivialized in this way, it is possible to change the definition and makeup of marriage or anything related to sexuality, as has been seen in our country and throughout the world. In the unbridled pursuit of personal fulfillment, little if any thought is given to either the short or long-term consequences of this radical social experiment.

**17.** Pope Francis has also pointed out the profound importance of understanding and embracing our masculinity or femininity:

*Learning to accept our body, to care for it and to respect its fullest meaning, is an essential element of any genuine human ecology. Also, valuing one's own body in its femininity or masculinity is necessary if I am going to be able to recognize myself in an encounter with someone who is different. In this way, we can joyfully accept the specific gifts of another man or woman, the work of God the Creator, and find mutual enrichment. It is not a healthy attitude which would seek “to cancel out sexual difference because it no longer knows how to confront it.”<sup>13</sup>*

In other words, the body and the nature of human love reflect the truth and goodness that God has placed in his creation. Accepting God's plan, inscribed in our deepest identity, opens to us a path to true happiness and fulfillment.

**18.** Amid these accomplishments and challenges, the splendor of Christ's teaching still shines forth in the world. Christians must stand firm and give joyful witness in the face of these new trials, knowing that only the love and truth of Christ can adequately respond to the lies and brokenness of our culture.

<sup>12</sup> Study by Dr. David Norris, 2006. See also Sylvain Lecomte et al., *Emerging Estrogenic Pollutants in the Aquatic Environment and Breast Cancer*; Gerald R. Tetreault et al., *Intersex and reproductive impairment of wild fish exposed to multiple municipal wastewater discharges*; and M.F. Sweeney et al., *Environmental Endocrine Disruptors: Effects on the human male reproductive system*.

<sup>13</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si*, §155.



## Part 2

# *The Goodness of Sexuality: The Dignity of the Person*

**19.** When God reached the pinnacle of his creation, he chose to fashion us in his image and likeness, male and female. We read in Scripture that when he had finished, “God looked at everything he had made, and found it very good.”<sup>14</sup>

We also know from Scripture that God is love,<sup>15</sup> and that our dignity comes from being made in his image and likeness. The Second Vatican Council underscored this reality by pointing out that human beings are the “only creature on earth which God willed for itself.”<sup>16</sup>

**20.** This truth about our dignity applies to our sexuality as well. Pope Benedict XVI taught that it is “the vocation to love that makes the human person an authentic image of God: man and woman come to resemble God to the extent that they become loving people.”<sup>17</sup> And as St. Augustine observed, faithful love within marriage enables us to give ourselves “entirely to that which is loved” and spurs us to a “love keeping itself entire and incorrupt for God.”<sup>18</sup>

**21.** God, the source of all life and love, planned from the beginning that the love between a man and a woman should image his own love and bring forth new life in the context of a family. The blessing of children was given to man and woman before their fall from grace, and it was not lost because of their sin.<sup>19</sup> Not only does human love point us toward the eternal, but in the family, the joy of eternity is glimpsed on earth. The family is where we first experience the gift of life, and ideally, an affirmation of our God-given dignity. It is where we learn that we are loved for who we are and not only for what we have or do. From their parents and other adults, children learn the dignity of the unborn, the disabled, the elderly, and the needy.

Pope Benedict XVI insightfully explained, “It is in the family that man discovers his relationality, not as a self-actualized, autonomous individual, but as a child, a spouse, a parent, whose identity

14 Genesis 1:31, NABRE.

15 1 John 4:16.

16 Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, 24.

17 Pope Benedict XVI’s Address to the Diocese of Rome, June 6, 2005.

18 St. Augustine, *De Moribus Ecclesiae*, cap. 15, 25. See St. John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 33.

19 Genesis 1:28.

is founded on being called to love, to receive himself from others and to give himself to others.”<sup>20</sup> Thus, from our parents we learn the meaning of our body and the calling to give of ourselves, that is, “the spousal meaning of the body.” Pope Francis also frequently points out that educating children extends to grandparents as well. “The elderly,” he has said, “are those who carry history, that carry doctrine, that carry the faith and give it to us as an inheritance. They are like a good vintage wine who have this strength from within to give us a noble heritage.”<sup>21</sup>

**22.** *Humanae Vitae* and the teachings of Saint John Paul II on the theology of the body convey these truths in a way that is both bold and pastorally aware of the challenges men and women encounter in the modern world. In these vitally important teachings, one finds the antidote to the widespread false ideas of freedom and the purpose of sexuality that so many are suffering from today.

<sup>20</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, Address to the John Paul II Pontifical Institute, May 13, 2011.

<sup>21</sup> Pope Francis, Homily for November 19, 2013 daily Mass in Casa Santa Marta.

## *The Truth of Sexuality: What God has joined together*

**23.** When Saint John Paul II was a young priest, he heard an interior call “to prepare young people for marriage,” because “it is necessary *to teach them love*. Love is not something that is learned, and yet there is nothing else as important to learn!”<sup>22</sup> These words of Saint John Paul II help us understand an essential point of *Humanae Vitae*. Love is something that must be taught, and that includes the truths that God has woven into love and sexuality.

**24.** We all experience that our loves are not the same: some of them are healthy and lead us to good places, but others are false – temptations that hurt us if we follow them. Authentic love, on the other hand, is not oppressive but reflects God’s own love and brings about freedom and growth.

**25.** In *Humanae Vitae*, Blessed Paul VI teaches us the truth about married love, listing its four essential qualities: it needs to be fully human, total, faithful, and fruitful.<sup>23</sup> This love is “above all fully human, a compound of sense and spirit” that is more than “natural instinct or emotional drive” but is an act of free will that survives the joys and sorrows of daily life.<sup>24</sup> Secondly, married love is total. Blessed Paul VI describes this aspect of married love as “that very special form of personal friendship in which husband and wife generously share everything.” In other words, their love places no conditions on one another. Thirdly, married love is faithful and exclusive until death, reflecting God’s fidelity. Finally, married love is fruitful and open to life, resulting in children being esteemed as marriage’s greatest gift, rather than a burden or threat to one’s happiness. For those couples who are not able to have children, their love can be fruitful when they seek to serve the community around them.

These four properties of married love help us understand “what God has joined together.”<sup>25</sup> Through marriage, the spouses are joined in their flesh, but also in their affections and spirit (fully human), in all the dimensions of their life (total), in their past and future (faithful and exclusive), and in the possibility of receiving the gift of a new life (fruitful). Genuine married love has these four features.

*The family is where we first experience the gift of life, and ideally, an affirmation of our God-given dignity. It is where we learn that we are loved for who we are and not only for what we have or do. From their parents and other adults, children learn the dignity of the unborn, the disabled, the elderly, and the needy.*

<sup>22</sup> St. John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, Chapter 19, retrieved online on 01/02/18 at [http://www.vatican.va/archive/books/threshold\\_hope/documents/chap19.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/books/threshold_hope/documents/chap19.html).

<sup>23</sup> *Humanae Vitae*, 9.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> Matthew 19:6.

## *The Inseparable Connection*

**26.** The explanation of these four properties of love prepares us to understand the heart of Blessed Paul VI's teaching in *Humanae Vitae*: the inseparable connection between the unitive and procreative aspects of sex.<sup>26</sup> Because God designed sex to have both a unitive and procreative dimension, man cannot separate them without causing real damage. Sex, too, is a part of "what God has joined together." It is a blessing! Like the wings of an eagle, these two meanings can only subsist together. If we try to separate them, we will lose both.

**27.** That contraception attacks the procreative aspect of sex is readily apparent from its design. What is less apparent, though, is how it harms the unitive dimension of sex. Saint John Paul II observed that our bodies were designed by God so that they speak a language. In the one-flesh union of husband and wife, that language communicates the total gift of self, including their fertility, without any limits or restrictions. But contraception introduces a falsehood into the language of the body. While the spouses indicate with their bodies that they are totally giving themselves, contracepted sex withholds one's fertility and the chance to become a potential parent.<sup>27</sup> Blessed Paul VI did not reject contraception because it is artificial but because it damages the conjugal act of the spouses, which lies at the heart of their intimacy and is the sanctuary of life. This makes contraceptive acts "repugnant to the nature of man and of woman" and contrary to God's plan, as *Humanae Vitae* states.<sup>28</sup>

**28.** Blessed Paul VI's teaching also helps us understand the link between contraception and *in vitro* fertilization, that is, between sex without babies and producing babies without sex. While contraception involves removing the procreative dimension, *in vitro* fertilization jettisons the unitive dimension of sexual intimacy. Instead of conceiving a child in an act of love, the couple produces a child in a lab, which violates the child's inherent dignity.

*Because God designed sex to have both a unitive and procreative dimension, man cannot separate them without causing real damage. Sex, too, is a part of "what God has joined together." It is a blessing! Like the wings of an eagle, these two meanings can only subsist together. If we try to separate them, we will lose both.*

<sup>26</sup> *Humanae Vitae*, 12.

<sup>27</sup> Contraception "leads not only to a positive refusal to be open to life but also to a falsification of the inner truth of conjugal love, which is called upon to give itself in personal totality," *Familiaris Consortio*, 32.

<sup>28</sup> HV, 13.

## Recent Papal Teaching

**29.** Fifty years after *Humanae Vitae*, the Magisterium of the Church has further developed its insights into an authentic theology of the body and of love. The recent popes help us understand better why Blessed Paul VI was right.

**30.** Saint John Paul II showed that where married love is concerned, man himself is at stake. In his *Theology of the Body*, he offered the ethical and anthropological foundations for the teaching of *Humanae Vitae*. He presented for the first time an organic vision of the human body as the sacrament of the person: our bodies are the visible sign of the invisible reality of our dignity.

**31.** Pope Benedict XVI offered a “theology of love,” which developed the truths found in *Humanae Vitae*. In his first encyclical, he discussed the accusation of Nietzsche, who said that Christianity poisoned *eros* and made the most beautiful thing in life bitter. Benedict XVI responded to this assertion by pointing to the joy that comes from faithful married couples who are open to life, which reflects the Trinity. “If you see love, you see the Trinity,” the Holy Father wrote.<sup>29</sup> In this way, he added, “God’s way of loving becomes the measure of human love.”<sup>30</sup>

**32.** In his recent exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, Pope Francis emphasized that spouses can grow in conjugal charity – the fullest expression of their love – by nurturing and deepening the spirituality of their wedding promises. In doing so, couples foster their friendship with God and one another.<sup>31</sup> In this manner, those experiencing difficulties can also turn to this same spirituality to obtain the needed strength to remain faithful.<sup>32</sup>

**33.** We may think that the truth of love is too demanding or abstract, but we have been made for the truth! Edith Stein, who was recognized as a saint in 1998, is a great example of this reality. Edith was a Jewish agnostic who also had a great longing for the truth. In the summer of 1921, she spent some weeks visiting friends and one day chose the Autobiography of St. Teresa of Avila from their library. She could not put the book down and read it cover to cover that night. When she finished the book, she said to herself: “This is the truth.” She encountered Jesus, who is the truth, and he set her free.<sup>33</sup> A few months later, on January 1, 1922, she was baptized a Catholic. Edith Stein recognized the truth for which she was made in those pages, and despite its challenges, she had to follow it.

**34.** The story of Kimberly and Scott Hahn’s encounter with *Humanae Vitae* further demonstrates the appeal of the truth about our sexuality. Kimberly was not Catholic when she first read *Humanae Vitae* but was attending a class on Christian ethics at an evangelical Protestant seminary. As one of her assignments, she had to pick a current topic of interest for research and make a presentation in a small group. At that time, she was practicing contraception with her husband. She was surprised to learn that Catholics oppose contraception (no Catholic friend had ever mentioned that fact) and she chose “Contraception according to Catholicism” as her topic. Though she was not a Catholic, *Humanae Vitae* spoke to her heart, “capturing a splendid vision of how our marriage could better reflect truth and love. In the few years since its promulgation, the prophetic nature of this document could already be seen.” She knew this was the truth about love.

29 Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*; 19, citing St. Augustine, *De Trinitate*, VIII, 8, 12. 14.

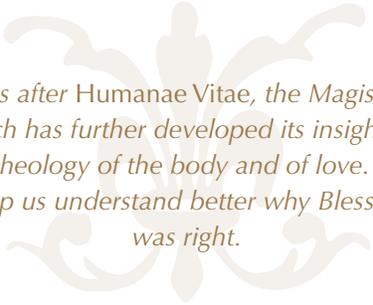
30 *Deus Caritas Est*, 11.

31 Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, Cf. §69, 73, 89 and 120.

32 *Ibid.*, §211, 315.

33 John 8:32.

After much discussion, prayer and consultation with trusted friends, Scott and Kimberly came to believe that the Church was right about sexuality and contraception. As they put it, they came to believe that “God’s design for marital love has at its heart a marital embrace unencumbered by devices or selfish designs.” Their act of self-donating love was meant to be “nothing less than an imitation of God’s total self-donation.”<sup>34</sup>



*Fifty years after Humanae Vitae, the Magisterium of the Church has further developed its insights into an authentic theology of the body and of love. The recent popes help us understand better why Blessed Paul VI was right.*

34 Kimberly Hahn, *Life-Giving Love: Embracing God’s Beautiful Design for Marriage*, Cf. p. 17-18, Servant Publications, Ann Arbor, MI, 2001.

## *The Beauty of Sexuality*

**35.** Saint John Paul II, who created World Youth Day, believed that “Young people are always searching for the beauty in love. They want their love to be beautiful.” He also observed that even if young people “give in to weakness, following models of behavior that can rightly be considered a ‘scandal in the contemporary world’... in the depths of their hearts they still desire a beautiful and pure love.”<sup>35</sup>

**36.** Sharing in God’s creative love by bringing the gift of new life into existence is one of life’s greatest joys and an “extremely important mission.”<sup>36</sup> This is because the gift of human life serves not only the natural good of procreation, but also includes the “supernatural and eternal” good of bringing new, immortal souls into the world.<sup>37</sup> This mission flows from the very nature of married love, which at its heart is a communion of persons shared between the husband and wife and the path by which they are called to grow in holiness. Through the sincere gift of themselves, spouses discover their authentic identities as children of God the Father, and their love radiates beauty and the splendor of the truth.

**37.** One example of the beauty of sexuality when lived according to the truth can be found in the story of a middle-aged Italian man who noticed an attractive, faith-filled woman at a dinner party following the First Mass of a mutual friend in late 1954. Gianna was a pediatric doctor who had completed her training during the difficult days of World War II. Pietro was an engineer who quickly rose through the ranks at a manufacturing company. Soon after meeting, Pietro and Gianna fell in love, propelled by their common faith. About four months later, the two were engaged, and five months after that they were married.

Gianna and Pietro faced the same struggles that many couples do today: finding a healthy work-life balance, raising children, nurturing their own relationship and allowing their faith to guide their lives. Gianna Beretta Molla, who was recognized in 2004 by the Church as a saint, is perhaps best known for choosing to sacrifice her own life, rather than abort her child. But she also lived a heroically virtuous life in many other ways.

Saint Gianna offered this beautiful insight when speaking about the high calling of marriage at a retreat she led for young girls. “To be called to family life does not mean getting engaged at fourteen. This would just be a bad sign. You have to start preparing yourself now to raise a family. One cannot enter this way without knowing how to love. To love means having a desire to become more perfect, to help the beloved become better, to overcome any selfishness, to give oneself.”<sup>38</sup>

Following God’s plan for our lives leads to happiness, and as St. Gianna noted, it also includes challenges. Marital love expresses the love of God made manifest both in creation and in Jesus’ gift of his life on the cross. Blessed Paul VI describes how married love “is total; that is, it is a very special form of personal friendship whereby the spouses generously give everything to each other without undue reservations and without concern for their selfish convenience. Those who truly love their spouse, not only love them for what they receive but also for their own sakes. This, spouses do joyfully, as they enrich (their beloved) with the gift of themselves.”<sup>39</sup> The beauty of this complete gift becomes a source of grace for the couple and a witness of God’s love for others.

35 St. John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, p. 123, Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. New York, 2005.

36 *Humanae Vitae*, 1.

37 *Ibid.*, 7.

38 *The Journey of Our Love: The Letters of St. Gianna Beretta and Pietro Molla*, p. 34, Pauline Books & Media, Boston, 2014.

39 *Ibid.*, 9.

**38.** One of the occasions on which married couples might be called to sacrifice involves the need to space or delay the arrival of another child for serious reasons. For that purpose, God has designed our bodies so that there are natural periods of infertility when couples seeking to avoid pregnancy can legitimately do so. NFP, which is now far more scientifically advanced than the old rhythm method, enables couples to accurately understand their fertility, maintain an openness to life, and grow in the kind of self-control that is necessary for a happy marriage.

The radical difference between NFP and contraception is made clear by the way that NFP demands a change in sexual lifestyle and opens the lines of communication for a couple, thus maintaining the beauty and integrity of marital love. It respects the dignity of each spouse by making them both responsible for the sexual act and helps prevent them from treating each other as objects. Such a change is an act of sacrificial love. Instead of using a pill or other contraceptive method, the spouses choose to make this sacrifice and grow in the virtues of charity and chastity. Only in this way, through the sincere gift of themselves, can their love grow in beauty.

Within the last couple years, I met a couple who was living together and had conceived a child but also wanted to get married in the Church. Their situation was further complicated by the fact that the man had been married previously and had children from those marriages. The woman wanted to regularize their situation with the Church. He began the annulment process, their child was born, and they went through marriage preparation classes and NFP classes. The couple was so convicted by what they learned in NFP classes that they decided they should live as brother and sister for several months until I happily officiated their sacrament of marriage. Their love was profoundly deepened by encountering Jesus and his plan for sexuality and the family. Not only were they transformed, but their extended family and their friends heard about their experience too.

**39.** We are all aware of the many obstacles to the beauty of marital love facing Catholic couples and families today. Our Catholic community plays an important role in the accompaniment of families, supporting them in the joys and challenges of family life. Families should support one another in the Christian life and share their insights on how to raise children in the faith. In the next section, we will see how we all have a role in spreading and articulating the good news of God's love.



*Sharing in God's creative love by bringing the gift of new life into existence is one of life's greatest joys and an "extremely important mission."*

## Part 3

# Proclaiming the Splendor of God's Love

**40.** Blessed Paul VI also taught us in his exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* that the Church's mission is essentially one of evangelization, the sharing of the Good News of our salvation. This good news includes the truth about human love and sexuality. Many in our culture consider the Church's teaching to be bad news, a burden and source of repression, but we must express it as part of the Good News, which will help people to overcome the many burdens and wounds that follow from our broken families and sexuality. In the Gospel, Jesus teaches us, "I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete."<sup>40</sup> Jesus desires our happiness.

Every Catholic has a mission to live and share the good news of God's plan for human sexuality. This requires courage to stand against the prevailing cultural winds, but Jesus calls us to nothing less. Only living in the truth will give us true freedom, true love, and true happiness.

We evangelize first by witnessing to what God has done in our own lives and by living out Christ's teaching in our family and work. We also need to share the truth of God's plan for us in charity when appropriate. We should be ready to explain the importance of the Church's teaching when we hear objections and questions. Christians are also called to take a stand against the gender ideology that is sweeping through our country. Pointing people to the teaching of Jesus is not confrontational, but an act of love, helping them to find true happiness. Catholics have many ways to share the Good News in our family life and workplaces.

**41.** Parents and married couples, you are the primary educators of your children and an example to the children of other families. You have the responsibility of helping them come to a mature understanding of sexuality and family life. A great place to start is to read some of the popular resources on St. John Paul II's Theology of the Body that are listed in the resource section of this letter. These will help you explain God's plan for sexuality and marriage to your children.

I encourage you to give careful attention to helping your children understand and avoid the

<sup>40</sup> John 15:11.

dangers of pornography addiction and casual sex. Unfortunately, and sadly, our children are exposed at a young age to many confusing distortions of human sexuality. Parents have shared with me how their 4-year-old children have come home from public schools where teachers have told them that they can be whatever gender they want and that people of the same sex can marry each other. Innocence is harmed and confusion is instilled by such teachings.

Having conversations early, without destroying their innocence, will be important so that children know how to respond when dangerous situations present themselves. You will also have to address the need for healing and forgiveness with compassion when mistakes are made and sins are committed. Parents, your relationship teaches your children about God's love and forms them in their understanding of the Christian family. From you, your children will learn the reality of marriage as a complete gift of love to the other. It is you they will look to for an understanding of what it means for love to be fully human, total, faithful and fruitful.

**42.** Priests and deacons, through your ordination you have received the ministry of teaching and preaching. You officiate at marriages and help couples understand the Sacrament of Marriage. I ask you to address the anniversary of *Humanae Vitae* in your parishes. Do not be afraid to proclaim the truth of God's plan for human love with gentle clarity and charity. It is a message that will liberate your flock, which needs the truth now more than ever. You are called not only to preach on God's plan, but also to accompany your people through the difficulties of living according to this plan. Invite your parishioners to experience the healing and strength that comes from the Sacrament of Confession. Priests, I remind you to always be gentle and merciful in Confession, following the example of Jesus and the father in the Parable of the Prodigal Son.

Thank you, too, my brothers, for your commitment to working with engaged couples, helping them to understand and prepare to enter the Sacrament of Matrimony. I ask you to also support recently married couples and those who are going through difficult times in their marriages. These moments can be opportunities for the grace of God to find its rightful place within many marriages and families. Trust in the power of Jesus Christ and what he accomplishes in those who encounter him. Accompany the faithful with mercy and tenderness, as it changes hearts to encounter the truth of Jesus.

**43.** Doctors and nurses, don't be afraid to embrace your faith in the context of your professional life. Christ will be with you, especially when you need to stand firm in the face of opposition from colleagues or employers to give witness to the truth. Although you are pressured to conform to the culture of death that influences the medical profession, it is possible to serve others in conformity with your faith, while also practicing good medicine. You carry out a mission of healing that supports the integrity and dignity of marriage when you provide medical care that is in accord with the truth of human life and love.

You can look to the example of Servant of God Dr. Jérôme Lejeune, a French pediatrician who discovered the chromosomal abnormality that causes Down syndrome. Lejeune stood against the use of his discovery to promote abortion and worked with Saint John Paul II to found the Pontifical Academy for Life. In our country, Dr. Thomas Hilgers has helped transform the treatment of women's health issues like infertility with the use of NaPro Technology and his establishment of the Pope Paul VI Institute. Natural Family Planning has also experienced advances as the understanding of men's and women's fertility has increased and technological developments have improved its usability and availability. In our own archdiocese, we are blessed with the recent addition of Bella Natural Women's Care and Marisol Health.

**44.** Lawyers and politicians, you play an important role in our society, working for the common good and protecting the rights of all. I thank you for standing up for the fam-

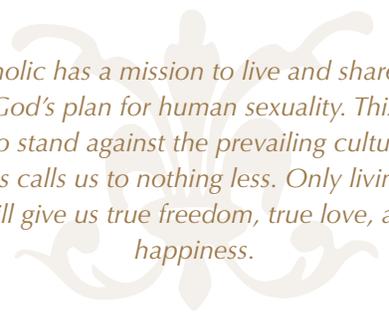
ily, for the rights of conscience, and for religious freedom. You have the example of St. Thomas More, both lawyer and politician, who put the service of Christ before his service to the king. I encourage you to follow his example of seeking what is true, right and just and refusing to give in to outside pressures or coercion. You play a crucial role in ensuring that the family continues to serve as the foundation of our society.

**45.** Communicators, artists, journalists and all those in media, I urge you to use your creative talents and your platform to communicate the beauty of God's vision of marital love. Media in all its forms continues to increase its influence in forming our culture, and you have the capability to bring the liberating truth about sex and marriage to people who desperately need it.

**46.** Teachers, catechists and youth leaders, you help parents foster the intellectual and spiritual growth of their children. In particular, parents will need help imparting and reinforcing God's vision of the human person and marriage. I ask you to become familiar with Saint John Paul II's *Theology of the Body*, its basic terms and concepts, and the educational resources available for children and teens found in the resource section of this letter. I ask educators to also reflect on how these concepts can be further incorporated into our Catholic schools, religious education programs and youth groups. Catholic schools, religious education programs and youth ministry groups should serve as a sanctuary for our children and a source of light to guide them as they grow to maturity in their faith.

**47.** Instructors of Natural Family Planning, thank you for the very important work you do in supporting couples in understanding their fertility. You are giving them a practical skill that allows their marriage relationship to experience the total gift of self. You accompany couples by providing the individual support and encouragement married couples need to live out God's plan faithfully in their married life. Do not allow yourselves to get discouraged by the difficulty of this work, but know that God is blessing you and your ministry. I encourage you to keep learning and to persevere in helping couples to be generous and responsible parents.

**48.** Engaged couples, I encourage you to make the most of your preparations for marriage. Jesus is the source of true love, the one who heals us of our sexual wounds and enables us to give ourselves more freely and fully in love to one another. Living according to God's plan for your life and staying united in prayer are of fundamental importance for a successful marriage. Use your engagement to grow in prayer together and to develop chastity, a virtue that will continue to guide you in self-control throughout your marriage. God is calling you to nothing less than a complete gift of yourself to each other, which you must freely choose and embrace in service to your future spouse.



*Every Catholic has a mission to live and share the good news of God's plan for human sexuality. This requires courage to stand against the prevailing cultural winds, but Jesus calls us to nothing less. Only living in the truth will give us true freedom, true love, and true happiness.*

## Conclusion

**49.** The child Jesus shows us the extent and measure of God's love. God loves us so much that he gave his only son to be one of us and to serve us through a complete gift of himself. God calls all of us to imitate Jesus in humble, merciful service to one another.

The splendor of God's love shining in our hearts enables us to embrace the truth about sexuality and marriage and leads us to imitate the generous, sacrificial love found at the heart of the Trinity. It gives us the grace to live like Christ, to embrace our sufferings by uniting them to his cross, and to find true happiness in giving ourselves away in love.

**50.** The 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of *Humanae Vitae* provides the Church with an opportunity to express our gratitude for all the blessings that God has bestowed upon us. *Humanae Vitae* was a gift for the Church and for the world, a courageous prophecy about the beauty of human life and married love. On this Feast of the Presentation of the Lord, we, like Simeon and Anna, lift our hearts in gratitude for the gift of Jesus Christ, the true light, who continues to bring his light to our fallen world. We thank God for the gift of our humanity, for creating us male and female, for the gift of marital love, and for the blessings of new life and family. *Humanae Vitae* serves as a great light in the midst of a dark and confused world when it comes to human sexual intimacy. We ask for the prayers of Blessed Paul VI as we look to his guidance for handing on and living according to the teachings of Christ in the world today. We ask also for the prayers of Mary and Joseph, Simeon and Anna, that the splendor of Christ's love might shine in our hearts as it shone in their hearts, helping us to live the joy of the Gospel!

*Given this 2<sup>nd</sup> day of February 2018, the Feast of the Presentation of Our Lord.*

*+Archbishop Samuel J. Aquila, S.T.L.*

# Definitions

**Beauty** – Beauty is the splendor of the truth. All human beings want their love to be beautiful, truthful and good.

**Body** – My body reveals who I am, a creature of God, called from love and to love. My body is my way of being present in the world around me and to participate in it. Through my body I can relate to others. The body reminds me that I am a son or a daughter. In their bodies man and woman can become the source of a new life. My body also reveals my relationship with God as his creature. Saint John Paul II explained that the body is the sacrament of the person, because it reveals our inner person. Our bodies have a language, which is the language of gift.

**Contraception** – According to Blessed Paul VI, contraception is “any action which either before, at the moment of, or after sexual intercourse, is specifically intended to prevent procreation, whether as an end or as a means,” (*Humanae Vitae*, 14).

**Charity** – Charity is the theological virtue by which we love God above all things for his own sake, and our neighbor as ourselves for the love of God (Catechism, 1822). Charity makes us friends of God.

**Conjugal Charity** – This is “the proper and specific way in which the spouses participate in and are called to live the very charity of Christ who gave Himself on the Cross” (*Familiaris Consortio*, 13). Spouses receive the gift of conjugal charity on their wedding day. This means that by living as a couple and loving each other and their children, they become friends of God.

**Chastity** – Chastity is the “successful integration of sexuality within the person and thus the inner unity of man in his bodily and spiritual being. Sexuality, in which man’s belonging to the bodily and biological world is expressed, becomes personal and truly human when it is integrated into the relationship of one person to another, in the complete and lifelong mutual gift of a man and a woman. The virtue of chastity therefore involves the integrity of the person and the integrality of the gift” (Catechism, 2337).

**Family** – “A man and a woman united in marriage, together with their children, form a family. This institution is prior to any recognition by public authority, which has an obligation to recognize it” (Catechism, 2202). A family “is established upon the consent of the spouses. Marriage and the family are ordered to the good of the spouses and to the procreation and education of children. The love of the spouses and the begetting of children create among members of the same family personal relationships and primordial responsibilities” (Catechism, 2201). The family is the human space where we encounter God and the principal agent of the New Evangelization. It is the sanctuary of life and the hope of our society.

**Freedom** – Contrary to the popular idea of freedom as the ability to do anything one wants, freedom is the capacity to choose the good, led by a rightly formed conscience. Freedom is rooted in the truth. The more one chooses what is good and true, the freer one becomes. One’s freedom is fulfilled in the gift of oneself to others.

**Love** – Love is the most fundamental passion which arises from the attraction to the good. It can be described as the inner longing of the lover for the beloved. Love is also an action: to will the good for the beloved. It is not just a physical attraction or a feeling but an act of the will where one says: “It is good that you exist.”

**Marriage** – Marriage is the faithful, exclusive, lifelong union of a man and a woman joined in an intimate community of life and love (Between Man and Woman, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2003). This community which constitutes the married state has been established by the Creator and endowed by him with its own proper laws” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 48,1). “The vocation to marriage is written in the very nature of man and woman as they came from the hand

of the Creator. Marriage is not a purely human institution” (Catechism, 1603). God himself is the author of marriage.

**Married love** – There are four characteristic features and demands of married love (*Humanae Vitae*, 9).

- a. Married love is fully human. It is an all-encompassing experience that involves a couple’s physical and spiritual dimensions.
- b. It is a love which is total – that very special form of personal friendship in which husband and wife generously share everything.
- c. Married love is also faithful and exclusive until death.
- d. Married love is fruitful and is always open to bringing new life into being.

**NFP** – The various methods of Natural Family Planning are based on observing the signs and symptoms of the fertile and infertile phases of a woman’s menstrual cycle. NFP may be used to both achieve as well as avoid pregnancy. It is not “Catholic contraception.” It doesn’t affect the conjugal union of the spouses, but instead generates a holistic approach to fruitfulness, which respects the truth of love.

**Responsible Parenthood** – This is the gift and task of spouses in relationship to their fertility and the gift of children (*Humanae Vitae*, 10). It requires that married couples prudentially prioritize their duties toward God, themselves, their families and human society. This requires an awareness of the biological processes involved in the transmission of life and demands that husbands and wives allow their reason and will to exert control over their innate drives and emotions. Responsible parenthood is exercised by those who prudently and generously decide to have more children, and by those who, for serious reasons connected with physical, economic, psychological and social conditions, and with due respect to moral precepts, decide not to have additional children for either a certain or an indefinite period of time.

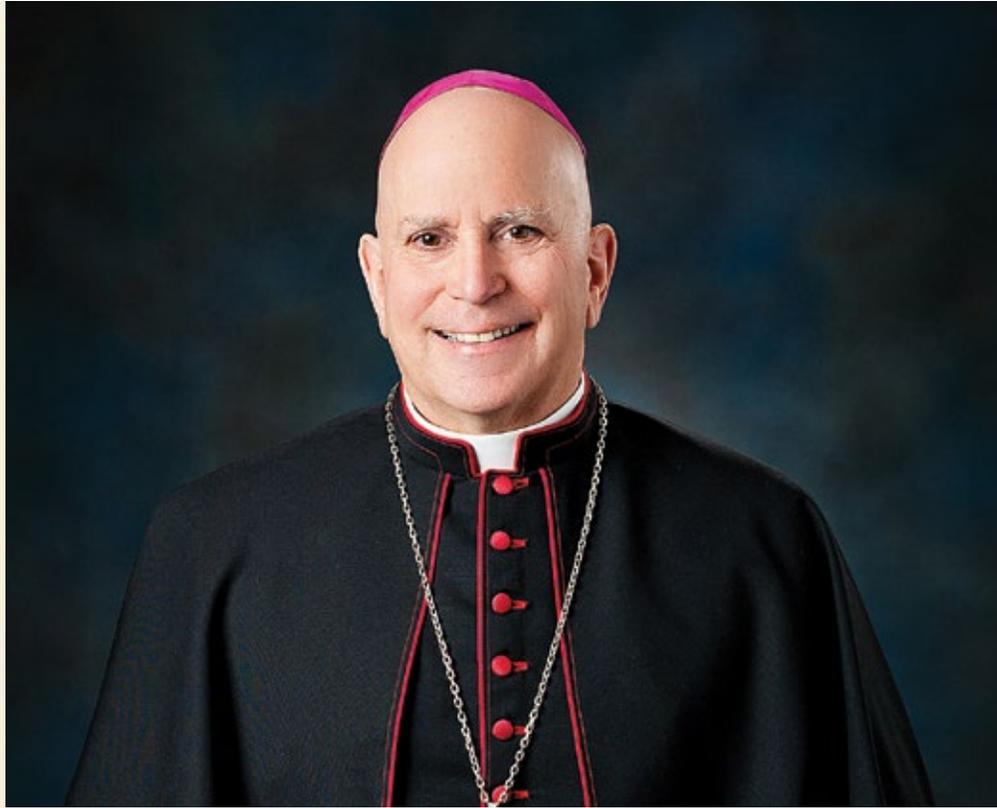
**The Sexual Revolution** – This refers to the programmatic attempt to separate sexual activity from marriage, to redefine the roles of mothers and fathers, and ultimately the attempt to deconstruct God-given realities like one’s gender. While this effort began in earnest in the 1960s, it continues unabated to this day.

**Theology of the Body** – At the beginning of his pontificate, Saint John Paul II offered a series of 129 teachings called “Catechesis on human love in the divine plan.” This weekly series of teachings took place between 1979 and 1984.

**Theology of Love** – In his first encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, Pope Benedict XVI developed his understanding of God’s plan for marriage and family. Among other things, he spoke about the relationship between the mystery of God and the love between spouses. The family is the place where the Theology of the Body and Theology of Love merge together.

**Vocation** – The word “vocation” is an excellent way to speak about the relationship that God has with every human being. God has called each of us to follow him in a specific and unique way and we answer him with our freedom. “We are not some casual and meaningless product of evolution. Each of us is the result of a thought of God. Each of us is willed, each of us is loved, each of us is necessary” (Pope Benedict XVI, April 24, 2005).

**Vocation to love** – God has created us in his own image and likeness and has inscribed in us the vocation to love and communion. This love includes the human body. There are two specific ways of realizing the vocation to love: marriage and virginity or celibacy. “Either one is, in its own proper form, an actuation of the most profound truth of man, of his being created in the image of God” (*Familiaris Consortio*, 11).



*The Most Rev.  
Samuel J. Aquila*

was installed as the archbishop of Denver on July 18, 2012 at Denver's Cathedral Basilica of the Immaculate Conception. Archbishop Aquila's episcopal motto is taken from the fifth verse of the second chapter of the Gospel of St. John: "Do whatever he tells you."

For additional reading visit  
[archden.org/archbishop/pastoral-letters](http://archden.org/archbishop/pastoral-letters)