



THE SIXTH COMMANDMENT

“You shall not commit adultery”

2. The Sacredness of Marriage

**Texts from the
Catechism of the Catholic Church**

THE LOVE OF HUSBAND AND WIFE

The sacrament of marriage

Sexuality is ordered to the conjugal love of man and woman. In marriage the physical intimacy of the spouses becomes a sign and pledge of spiritual communion. Marriage bonds between baptized persons are sanctified by the sacrament. (2360)

Sexuality, by means of which man and woman give themselves to one another through the acts which are proper and exclusive to spouses, is not something simply biological, but concerns the innermost being of the human person as such. It is realized in a truly human way only if it is an integral part of the love by which a man and woman commit themselves totally to one another until death. (2361)

The acts in marriage by which the intimate and chaste union of the spouses takes place are noble and honourable; the truly human performance of these acts fosters the self-giving they signify, and enriches the spouses in joy and gratitude. Sexuality is a source of joy and pleasure:

“The Creator himself... established that in the [generative] function, spouses should experience pleasure and enjoyment of body and spirit. Therefore, the spouses do nothing evil in seeking this pleasure and enjoyment. They accept what the Creator has intended for them. At the same time, spouses should know how to keep themselves within the limits of just moderation.” (Pope Pius XII) (2362)

The spouses’ union achieves the twofold end of marriage: the good of the spouses themselves, and the transmission of life. These two meanings or values of marriage cannot be separated without altering the couple's spiritual life and compromising the goods of marriage and the future of the family.

The conjugal love of man and woman thus stands under the twofold obligation of fidelity and fecundity. (2363)

Conjugal fidelity

The married couple forms the intimate partnership of life and love established by the Creator and governed by his laws; it is rooted in the conjugal covenant, that is, in their irrevocable personal consent. Both give themselves definitively and totally to one another. They are no longer two; from now on they form one flesh. The covenant they freely contracted imposes on the spouses the obligation to preserve it as unique and indissoluble. “What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder.” (Mk 10:9) (2364)

Fidelity expresses constancy in keeping one's given word. God is faithful. The Sacrament of Matrimony enables man and woman to enter into Christ's fidelity for his Church. Through conjugal chastity, they bear witness to this mystery before the world. (2365)

The fecundity of marriage

Fecundity is a gift, an *end of marriage*, for conjugal love naturally tends to be fruitful. A child does not come from outside as something added on to the mutual love of the spouses, but springs from the very heart of that mutual giving, as its fruit and fulfilment. So the Church, which ‘is on the side of life’, teaches that “it is necessary that each and every marriage act remain ordered *per se* to the procreation of human life”. “This particular doctrine, expounded on numerous occasions by the Magisterium, is based on the inseparable connection, established by God, which man on his own initiative may not break, between the unitive significance and the procreative significance which are both inherent to the marriage act.” (Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae*) (2366)

Called to give life, spouses share in the creative power and fatherhood of God. Married couples should regard it as their proper mission to transmit human life, and to educate their children; they should realize that they are thereby cooperating with the love of God the Creator and are, in a certain sense, its interpreters. They will fulfil this duty with a sense of human and Christian responsibility. (2367)

A particular aspect of this responsibility concerns the *regulation of procreation*. 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. Moreover, they should conform their behaviour to the objective criteria of morality. By safeguarding both essential aspects of marriage, the unitive and the procreative, the conjugal act preserves in its fullness the sense of true mutual love and its orientation toward man's exalted vocation to parenthood. (2368-2369)

Periodic continence, that is, the methods of birth regulation based on self-observation and the use of infertile periods, are in conformity with the objective criteria of morality. These methods respect the bodies of the spouses, encourage tenderness between them and favour the education of an authentic freedom. In contrast, every action which, whether in anticipation of the conjugal act, or in its accomplishment, or in the development of its natural consequences, proposes, whether as an end or as a means, to render procreation impossible is intrinsically evil. (2370)

Let all be convinced that human life and the duty of transmitting it are not limited by the horizons of this life only: their true evaluation and full significance can be understood only in reference to *man's eternal destiny*. (2371)

The state may not legitimately usurp the initiative of spouses, who have the primary responsibility for the procreation and education of their children. In this area, it is not authorized to employ means contrary to the moral law. (2372)

The gift of a child

Sacred Scripture and the Church's traditional practice see in *large families* a sign of God's blessing and the parents' generosity. (2373)

Couples who discover that they are sterile suffer greatly. Research aimed at reducing human sterility is to be encouraged, on condition that it is placed at the service of the human person, of his inalienable rights and his true and integral good according to the design and will of God. (2374-2375)

Techniques that entail the dissociation of husband and wife, by the intrusion of a person other than the couple (donation of sperm or ovum, surrogate uterus), are gravely immoral. These techniques (*heterologous artificial insemination and fertilization*) infringe the child's right to be born of a father and mother known to him and bound to each other by marriage. (2376)

Techniques involving only the married couple (*homologous artificial insemination and fertilization*) are perhaps less reprehensible, yet remain morally unacceptable. They dissociate the sexual act from the procreative act. The act which brings the child into existence is one

that entrusts the life and identity of the embryo into the power of doctors and biologists and establishes the domination of technology over the origin and destiny of the human person. Such a relationship of domination is in itself contrary to the dignity and equality that must be common to parents and children. (2377)

A child is not something *owed* to one, but is a *gift*. The 'supreme gift of marriage' is a human person. A child may not be considered a piece of property, an idea to which an alleged 'right to a child' would lead. In this area, only the child possesses genuine rights: the right to be the fruit of the specific act of the conjugal love of his parents, and the right to be respected as a person from the moment of his conception. (2378)

The Gospel shows that physical sterility is not an absolute evil. Spouses who still suffer from infertility after exhausting legitimate medical procedures should unite themselves with the Lord's Cross, the source of all spiritual fecundity. They can give expression to their generosity by adopting abandoned children or performing demanding services for others. (2379)

OFFENCES AGAINST THE DIGNITY OF MARRIAGE

Adultery

Adultery refers to marital infidelity. When two partners, of whom at least one is married to another party, have sexual relations - even transient ones - they commit adultery. Christ condemns even adultery of mere desire. The sixth commandment and the New Testament forbid adultery absolutely. The prophets denounce the gravity of adultery; they see it as an image of the sin of idolatry. (2380)

Adultery is an injustice. He who commits adultery fails in his commitment. He does injury to the sign of the covenant which the marriage bond is, transgresses the rights of the other spouse and undermines the institution of marriage by breaking the contract on which it is based. He compromises the good of human generation and the welfare of children who need their parents' stable union. (2381)

Divorce

The Lord Jesus insisted on the original intention of the Creator who willed that marriage be indissoluble. He abrogates the accommodations that had slipped into the old Law. Between the baptized, a ratified and consummated marriage cannot be dissolved by any human power or for any reason other than death. (2382)

The separation of spouses while maintaining the marriage bond can be legitimate in certain cases provided for by canon law. If civil divorce remains the only possible way of ensuring certain legal rights, the care of the children, or the protection of inheritance, it can be tolerated and does not constitute a moral offence. (2383)

Divorce is a grave offence against the natural law. It claims to break the contract, to which the spouses freely consented, to live with each other till death. Divorce does injury to the covenant of salvation, of which sacramental marriage is the sign. Contracting a new union, even if it is recognized by civil law, adds to the gravity of the rupture: the remarried spouse is then in a situation of public and permanent adultery. (2384)

Divorce is immoral also because it introduces disorder into the family and into society. This disorder brings grave harm to the deserted spouse, to children traumatized by the separation of their parents and often torn between them, and because of its contagious effect which makes it truly a plague on society. (2385)

It can happen that one of the spouses is the innocent victim of a divorce decreed by civil law; this spouse therefore has not contravened the moral law. There is a considerable difference between a spouse who has sincerely tried to be faithful to the sacrament of marriage and is unjustly abandoned, and one who through his own grave fault destroys a canonically valid marriage. (2386)

Other offences against the dignity of marriage

The predicament of a man who, desiring to convert to the Gospel, is obliged to repudiate one or more wives with whom he has shared years of conjugal life, is understandable. However, *polygamy* is not in accord with the moral law. Conjugal communion is radically contradicted by polygamy; this, in fact, directly negates the plan of God which was revealed from the beginning, because it is contrary to the equal personal dignity of men and women who in matrimony give themselves with a love that is total and therefore unique and exclusive. The Christian who has previously lived in polygamy has a grave duty in justice to honour the obligations contracted in regard to his former wives and his children. (2387)

Incest designates intimate relations between relatives or in-laws within a degree that prohibits marriage between them. St. Paul stigmatizes this especially grave offence which corrupts family relationships: "It is actually reported that there is immorality among you... for a man is living with his father's wife... In the name of the Lord Jesus... you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh..." (1 Cor 5:1, 4-5) (2388)

Connected to incest is any sexual abuse perpetrated by adults on children or adolescents entrusted to their care. The offence is compounded by the scandalous harm done to the physical and moral integrity of the young, who will remain scarred by it all their lives; and the violation of responsibility for their upbringing. (2389)

In a so-called *free union*, a man and a woman refuse to give juridical and public form to a liaison involving sexual intimacy. The expression 'free union' is fallacious: what can 'union' mean when the partners make no commitment to one another, each exhibiting a lack of trust in the other, in himself, or in the future?

The expression covers a number of different situations: concubinage, rejection of marriage as such, or inability to make long-term commitments. All these situations offend against the dignity of marriage; they destroy the very idea of the family; they weaken the sense of fidelity. They are contrary to the moral law. The sexual act must take place exclusively within marriage. Outside of marriage it always constitutes a grave sin and excludes one from sacramental communion. (2390)

IN BRIEF

- **The covenant which spouses have freely entered into entails faithful love. It imposes on them the obligation to keep their marriage indissoluble. (2397)**
- **Fecundity is a good, a gift and an end of marriage. By giving life, spouses participate in God's fatherhood. (2398)**
- **The regulation of births represents one of the aspects of responsible fatherhood and motherhood. Legitimate intentions on the part of the spouses do not justify recourse to morally unacceptable means (for example, direct sterilization or contraception). (2399)**
- **Adultery, divorce, polygamy and free union are grave offences against the dignity of marriage. (2400)**