

The Constitution of LOJ Ministries

ARTICLE I. STATEMENT OF FAITH

- 1. The Triune God.** We believe in one God, eternally existing in three equally divine Persons: The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, who know, love, and glorify one another. This divine and infinite Being consists of three real persons, the Father, the Son (The Word), and the Holy Spirit. These three have the same substance, power, and eternity, each having the whole divine essence without this essence being divided. The Father is not derived from anyone, neither begotten nor proceeding. The Son is eternally begotten of the Father. The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. All three are infinite and without beginning and are therefore only one God, who is not to be divided in nature and being. Yet these three are distinguished by several distinctive characteristics and personal relations. This truth of the Trinity is the foundation of all of our fellowship with God and of our comforting dependence on Him.
- 2. The Son.** God has graciously disclosed His existence and power in the created order, and has supremely revealed himself to fallen human beings in the person of His Son, the incarnate Word. The Son of God, the second person of the Holy Trinity, is truly and eternally God. He is the brightness of the Father's glory, the same in substance and equal with Him. He made the world and sustains and governs everything He has made. When the fullness of time came, He took upon himself human nature, with all the essential properties and common weaknesses of it but without sin. He was born of the blessed Virgin Mary, of her substance: so that God and Man, two whole, perfect, and distinct natures were inseparably joined together in one person, without converting one into the other or mixing them together to produce a different or blended nature. This person is truly God and truly man, yet one Christ, the only mediator between God and humanity.

God the Father was pleased, in His eternal purpose, to choose and ordain the Lord Jesus, His only begotten Son, according to the covenant made between them, to be the mediator between The Father and humanity. The Father chose Him to be prophet, priest, and king, and to be Head and Savior of the Church, the heir of all things, and judge of the world. From all eternity The Father gave to the Son a people to be His offspring. In time, these people would be redeemed, called, justified, sanctified, and glorified by Him.

- 3. The Scriptures.** The Bible is called the written Word of God. This does not mean that the Bible fell from heaven ready-made. Neither does this mean that God dictated the Bible word for word to men who were merely His passive instruments. It means that God has revealed Himself as the true and living God to His People, and that as one aspect of

His divine self-revelation God inspired His People to produce scriptures, i.e., writings which constitute the true and genuine expressions of His Truth and His Will for His People and for the whole world.

The words of the Bible are human words, for indeed, all words are human. They are human words, however, which God Himself inspired to be written in order to remain as the scriptural witness to Himself. As human words, the words of the Bible contain all of the marks of the men who wrote them, and of the time and the culture in which they were written. Nevertheless, in the full integrity of their human condition and form, the words of the Bible are truly the very Word of God.

The Bible is truly the Word of God in human form because its origin is not in man but in God who willed and inspired its creation. In this sense, the Bible is not like any other book. In the Bible, in and through the words of men, one finds the self-revelation of God and can come to a true and genuine knowledge of Him and His will and purpose for man and the world.

All scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work (2 Tim 3.16–17).

The Bible, as the divinely-inspired Word of God in the words of men, contains no formal errors or inner contradictions concerning the relationship between God and the world. There may be incidental inaccuracies of a non-essential character in the Bible. But the eternal spiritual and doctrinal message of God, presented in the Bible in many different ways, remains perfectly consistent, authentic, and true.

- 4. Creation of Humanity.** In the beginning God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, was pleased to create or make the world and all things in it, both visible and invisible, and all of it called very good. He did this to manifest the glory of His eternal power, wisdom, and goodness. After God had made all the other creatures, He created humanity. He made them male and female, with rational and immortal souls, thereby making them suited to that life lived unto God for which they were created. They were made in the image of God, being endowed with knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness. They had the law of God written in their hearts and the power to fulfill it. Even so, they could still transgress the law, because they were left to the liberty of their own will, which was subject to change. In addition to the law written in their hearts, they received a command not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. As long as they obeyed this

command, they were happy in their communion with God and had dominion over creation.

Men and women, equally made in the image of God, enjoy equal access to God by faith in Christ Jesus and are both called to move beyond passive self-indulgence to significant private and public engagement in family, Church, and civic life. Adam and Eve were made to complement each other in a one-flesh union that establishes the only normative pattern of sexual relations for men and women, such that marriage ultimately serves as an icon or image of the union between Christ and His Church.

In God's wise purposes, men and women are not simply interchangeable, but rather they complement each other in mutually enriching ways. God ordains that they assume distinctive roles which reflect the loving relationship between Christ and the Church, the husband exercising headship in a way that displays the caring, sacrificial love of Christ, and the wife submitting to her husband in a way that models the love of the Church for her Lord.

Both men and women are encouraged to serve Christ and to be developed to their full potential in the manifold ministries of the people of God. Their distinctive roles are grounded in creation, fall, and redemption and must not be sidelined by appeals to cultural developments.

- 5. The Fall.** God created humanity upright and perfect. He gave them a righteous law that would have led to life if they had kept it but threatened death if they broke it. Yet they did not remain for long in this position of honor. Satan used the craftiness of the serpent to seduce Eve. Adam acted without any outside compulsion and deliberately transgressed the law of his Creator and the command given to him by eating the forbidden fruit.

By this sin our first parents fell from their original righteousness and communion with God. We fell in them, and through this, death came upon all. All became dead in sin and completely defiled in all the capabilities and parts of soul and body.

By God's appointment they were the representatives of the whole human race. Because of this their corrupt nature passed on to all their offspring who descended from them by ordinary procreation. Their descendants are now conceived in sin and are by nature children of wrath, the servants of sin, and partakers of death and all other miseries—spiritual, temporal, and eternal—unless the Lord Jesus sets them free.

- 6. The Gospel.** We believe that the gospel is the good news of Jesus Christ—God’s very wisdom. Utter folly to the world, even though it is the power of God to those who are being saved. This good news is Christological, centering on the cross and resurrection: the gospel is not proclaimed if Christ is not proclaimed, and the authentic Christ has not been proclaimed if His death and resurrection are not central.

The ultimate perfection of God’s purpose for man is fulfilled in Christ. He alone is the fulfillment of the law and the prophets. He alone is the “Holy One of God.” He alone is perfectly righteous and wholly without sin. In and through Christ, by means of the Holy Spirit, all men can share in the glory of God and become participants in God’s own holiness.

This good news is biblical because His death and resurrection are according to the Scriptures; theological and salvific because Christ died for our sins, to reconcile us to God; historical because if the saving events did not happen, our faith is worthless, we are still in our sins, and we are to be pitied more than all others; Apostolic because the message was entrusted to and transmitted by the Apostles, who were witnesses of these saving events; and intensely personal and communal because it is received, believed, and held firmly, that is, individual persons are saved, but they are saved into the communion of the saints and the Kingdom of the Heavens.

- 7. Redemption.** We believe that, moved by love and in obedience to His Father, the eternal Son perfectly obeyed His heavenly Father, lived a sinless life, performed miraculous signs, was crucified under Pontius Pilate, arose bodily from the dead on the third day, and ascended into heaven.

As King, He is seated at the right hand of God the Father, exercising in heaven and on earth all of God’s sovereignty, and is our High Priest and righteous Advocate. We believe that by His incarnation, life, death, resurrection, and ascension, Jesus Christ acted as our representative and substitute. He did this so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God: on the cross He canceled sin, propitiated God, and, by bearing the full penalty of our sins, reconciled to God all those who believe.

By His resurrection Christ Jesus was vindicated by His Father, broke the power of death and defeated Satan who once had power over it, and brought everlasting life to all His people; by His ascension He has been forever exalted as Lord and has prepared a place for us to be with Him. Those that presume to say that every person shall be saved by the law or sect which he/she professes, as long as he/she is diligent to frame his/her life according to that law and the light of nature, do not profess the true faith of Scripture. For

holy Scripture says that salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name given under heaven by which we can or must be saved. Because God chose the lowly things of this world, the despised things, the things that are not, to nullify the things that are, no human being can ever boast before Him—Christ Jesus has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness, and redemption.

- 8. Justification.** We are accounted righteous before God, only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ by Faith, and not for our own works.

Faith that receives and rests on Christ and His righteousness is the only instrument of justification. Yet it does not occur by itself in the person justified, but it is always accompanied by every other saving grace. It is not a dead faith but works through love.

We believe that Christ, by His obedience and death, fully discharged the debt of all those who are justified. By His sacrifice, He bore in our stead the punishment due us for our sins, making a proper, real, and full satisfaction to God's justice on our behalf. Inasmuch as Christ was given by the Father for us, and His obedience and punishment were accepted in place of our own, freely and not for anything in us, this justification is solely of grace, in order that both the exact justice and the rich grace of God might be glorified in the justification of sinners. We believe that a zeal for personal and public obedience flows from this free justification.

- 9. The Power of the Holy Spirit.** We believe that this salvation, attested in all Scripture and secured by Jesus Christ, is applied to His people by the Holy Spirit. A person can abide in Christ, accomplish His commandments, and be in communion with God the Father only by the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in his or her life. Spiritual life is life in and by the Holy Spirit of God.

The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son and is sent into the world through Christ so that human persons can fulfill God's will in their lives and be like Christ. The Holy Spirit makes people to be "little christs," that is, Christ-like, and the "anointed" children of God. The Holy Spirit glorifies the Lord Jesus Christ, and, as the other Paraclete, is present with and in believers.

He convicts the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment, and by His powerful and mysterious work regenerates spiritually dead sinners, awakening them to repentance and faith, and in Him they are baptized into union with the Lord Jesus, such that they are justified before God by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

By the Spirit's agency, believers are renewed, sanctified, and adopted into God's family; they participate in the divine nature and receive His sovereignly distributed gifts. The Holy Spirit is himself the down payment of the promised inheritance.

10. The Church & The Kingdom of God. The visible Church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men and women, in the which the pure Word of God is preached, and Baptism & The Lord's Supper are duly ministered according to Christ's command.

The visible Church, which is also catholic or universal under the Gospel, consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion, and of their children, and is the Kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God, outside of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation.

All people throughout the world who profess the faith of the gospel and obedience to God through Christ in keeping with the gospel are and may be called visible saints, as long as they do not destroy their own profession by any foundational errors or unholy living. All local congregations ought to be made up of these.

The Lord Jesus Christ is the head of the Church. By the Father's appointment, all authority is conferred on Him in a supreme and sovereign manner to call, institute, order and govern the Church.

The new and abundant life given by God to man through Christ and the Holy Spirit in creation and redemption is the life of the Christian Church. The life of the Church is the life originally willed for man and this world by God. It is the life of God Himself originally given in creation. It is the spiritual life.

One should not think of the spiritual life of the Church as some particularly special kind of "religious life" different from life itself as we have received it in our creation by God. There are not two lives, one "natural" and one "religious." There is only one life that is real, genuine and true. It is life with God, the life of the Church. Any other life is not life at all: it is the way of death.

What differentiates the life of the Church from the life of "this world," also called life "according to the flesh," is only evil and sin. The Church is called the Kingdom of God on earth; In the New Testament it is also called the "new creation," the Body and Bride of Christ Himself.

All believers are obligated to join themselves to local churches when and where they have the opportunity. Likewise, all who are admitted to the privileges of a church are also subject to the discipline and government of it, according to the rule of Christ.

We believe that those who have been saved by the grace of God through union with Christ by faith and through regeneration by the Holy Spirit enter the Kingdom of God and delight in the blessings of the new covenant: the forgiveness of sins, the inward transformation that awakens a desire to glorify, trust, and obey God, and the prospect of the glory yet to be revealed.

God's gift of eternal life in Christ and the Holy Spirit is the Kingdom of God. Jesus has brought the Kingdom of God to the world through the Spirit in the Church. Spiritual life is life—already now—in the Kingdom of God.

To live already now in the Kingdom of God is to live in freedom from sin and death in the gracious life of Christ and the Church. A person who has died to sin with Christ and has been sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit who participates in Christ's Body and Blood in the Lord's Supper is already a member of the Kingdom of God.

The Kingdom of God is an invasive power that plunders Satan's dark kingdom and regenerates and renovates through repentance and faith the lives of people rescued from that kingdom. It therefore inevitably establishes a new communion of human life together under God.

The Church is called the Kingdom of God on earth; and the presence and power of the Kingdom is identified with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit who abides in the faithful, bringing to them the presence and power of God the Father through His Son Jesus Christ.

We believe that God's New Covenant people have already come to the heavenly Jerusalem; they are already seated with Christ in the heavenlies. This universal Church is manifest in local churches of which Christ is the only Head; thus each "local church" is, in fact, the Church, the household of God, the assembly of the living God, and the pillar and foundation of the truth.

These new covenant people are called saints, and all saints are united to Jesus Christ their head by His Spirit and by faith, although this does not make them one person with Him. They have fellowship in His graces, sufferings, death, resurrection, and glory. Since they are united to one another in love, they have communion in each other's gifts and graces

and are obligated to carry out these duties, both public and private, in an orderly way to promote their mutual good, both in the inner and outer aspects of their lives.

Saints by profession are obligated to maintain a holy fellowship and communion in worshiping God and in performing other spiritual services that promote their mutual edification. They are to aid each other in material things according to their various abilities and needs. They should especially exercise communion in the relationships they have in their families and churches.

Yet the rule of the gospel also directs them, as God provides opportunity, to extend their sharing to the whole household of faith, to all those who in every place call upon the name of the Lord Jesus. Nevertheless, their communion with one another as saints does not take away or infringe on the personal ownership that people have in their goods and possessions.

Crucially, this gospel we cherish has both personal and corporate dimensions, neither of which may properly be overlooked. Christ Jesus is our peace: He has not only brought about peace with God, but also peace between alienated peoples. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both Jew and Gentile to God through the cross, by which He put to death their hostility.

The Church serves as a sign of God's future new world when its members live for the service of one another and their neighbors, rather than for self-focus. The Church is the corporate dwelling place of God's Spirit, and the continuing witness to God in the world.

11. Baptism and the Lord's Supper. We believe that baptism and the Lord's Supper are commanded by the Lord Jesus himself. The former is connected with entrance into the new covenant community, the latter with ongoing covenant renewal. Together they are simultaneously God's pledge to us, divinely ordained means of grace, our public vows of submission to the once crucified and now resurrected Christ, and anticipations of His return and of the consummation of all things.

We believe that all Christians may baptize new believers. However, we believe that baptism should, when possible, be carried out by an ordained minister.

In His command, the Lord Jesus has appointed His ministers to pray and to bless the elements of bread and wine and in this way to set them apart from a common to a holy use. They are to take and break the bread, take the cup, and give both to the

communicants while also participating themselves. For this reason, we believe that the Lord's Supper is to only be administered by ordained ministers of the Word of God.

12. Last Things and The Final Judgment. We believe in the personal, glorious, and bodily return of our Lord Jesus Christ with His holy angels, when He will exercise His role as final Judge, and His kingdom will be consummated.

The bodies of those who have died return to dust. But their souls neither die nor sleep, because they have an immortal character, and immediately return to God who gave them. The souls of the righteous are then made perfect in holiness and are received into paradise. There they are with Christ and behold the face of God in light and glory while they wait for the full redemption of their bodies. The souls of the wicked are thrown into Hell, where they remain in torment and utter darkness, reserved for the judgment of the great day. The Scripture recognizes no place other than these two for souls separated from their bodies.

At the last day, those saints who are found alive will not sleep but will be changed. All the dead will be raised up with the very same bodies, not different ones, though they will have different qualities. Their bodies will be united again to their souls forever.

The bodies of the unjust will be raised up to judgment and eternal hell, as our Lord himself taught, and the just to eternal blessedness in the presence of Him who sits on the throne and of the Lamb, in the new heaven and the new earth, the home of righteousness. By His Spirit the bodies of the just will be raised to honor and will be made like Christ's own.

ARTICLE II. MARRIAGE & SEXUALITY

1. Sexuality. The sexual character of human persons has a positive role to play in human spirituality. Like all things human, sexuality must be sanctioned by God and inspired with the Holy Spirit, used for the purposes God has intended. And like all things human, through its misuse and abuse, sexuality can be perverted and corrupted, becoming an instrument of sin rather than the means for glorifying God and fulfilling oneself as made in His image, and according to His likeness.

“...The body is not meant for immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body... Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I therefore take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! Do you not know that he who joins himself to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, “The two shall become one.” But he who is united to the Lord becomes one spirit with Him. Shun immorality. Every other sin which a man commits is outside the body; but the immoral man sins against his own body. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God? You are not your own; you were bought with a price. So, glorify God in your body.” (1 Cor. 6:13-20)

The teaching of the Apostle Paul about sexuality is analogous to his teaching about eating and drinking and all bodily functions. They are given by God for spiritual reasons to be used for His glory. In themselves they are holy and pure. When misused or adored as an end in themselves, they become the instruments of sin and death. The apostle specifically says that all sexual perversions have as their direct cause man’s rebellion against God.

“Therefore, God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. For this reason, God gave them up to dishonorable passions. Their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural, and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in their own persons the due penalty for their error. And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a base mind and to improper conduct... Though they know God’s decree that those who do such things deserve to die, they not only do them but approve those who practice them.” (Rom. 1:24-32)

That those who “do such things deserve to die” was taken literally in the law of Moses; thus adulterers, homosexuals, incestuous people and those committing sexual acts with beasts were ordered to be “put to death” (Lev 20.10-16).

In following this teaching, while hoping on the mercy of God and the forgiveness of Christ for all sinners, the New Testament scriptures are even more strict in their demands regarding sexual purity. Jesus, who forgave the woman caught in adultery (Jn. 8:7-11) and the repentant harlot who washed His feet with her hair (Lk. 7:36-50), gave the following teaching in His sermon on the mount:

“You have heard that it was said, “You shall not commit adultery.” But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and throw it away; it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell. It was also said, “Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.” But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the grounds of infidelity, makes her an adulteress; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.” (Mt. 5:27-32; see also 19:3-9, Rom 7:3).

The Apostle Paul says simply that unrepentant adulterers, fornicators, and homosexuals will not enter the Kingdom of God (cf. 1 Cor. 6:9-10, Gal 5:19).

“Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled; for God will judge the immoral and the adulterous.” (Heb. 13:4)

Thus, according to the revelation of God, sexual relations are holy and pure only within the communion of marriage, with the marriage relationship being that between one man and one woman forever. Those who are not married and those who choose by the will of God not to marry must abstain from all sexual relations since such relations cannot possibly fulfill the function given to the sexual act by God in creation. This does not mean that there will be no sexual character to the unmarried person’s spiritual life, for the unmarried man and the unmarried woman will still express their humanity in masculine and feminine spiritual forms. The virtues and fruits of the Spirit in each, as in those who are married, are identical, but the manner of their incarnation and expression will be proper to the particular sexual form, that is male or female, of their common humanity, as well as the individual uniqueness of each person.

The single person who lives his or her whole life without husband or wife is called to virginity as a witness in this world of the Kingdom of God where “in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage but are like angels in heaven” (Mt 22–30). It means rather that they perpetually serve and praise God as His children, comprising, as it were, the universal family of God without being themselves the leaders of families on this earth. In this way, they express themselves as the fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters of all people in Christ.

“Who is my mother, and who are my brethren?” And stretching out His hands toward His disciples, He said, “Here are my mother and my brethren! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.” (Mk 3:34-35)

“Do not rebuke an older man, but exhort him as you would a father; treat younger men like brothers, older women like mothers, younger women like sisters, in all purity.” (1 Tim. 5:1-2)

These words, of course, are intended for all, married and unmarried, but they also most obviously have special significance for those who, for Christ’s sake, are living the unmarried life. For as those who are married have the task of living their spiritual lives with the cares of the family and within the context of its needs and demands, the Christian who is single lives his or her life in Christ without these conditions.

“I wish that all were as I myself am [i.e. unmarried, says Paul]. But each has his own special gift from God, one of one kind and one of another. . . . The unmarried man is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to please the Lord, but the married man is anxious about worldly affairs, how to please his wife, and his interests are divided. And the unmarried woman or girl is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to be holy in body and spirit; but the married woman is anxious about worldly affairs, how to please her husband. I say this for your own benefit, not to lay any restraint upon you, but to promote good order and to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord.” (1 Cor. 7:34-35)

“So he that marries . . . does well; and he who refrains from marriage will do better.” (1 Cor. 7:7-40)

The teaching here is clear. People can serve God and live the spiritual life both in marriage and in the single life. And people can sin in both as well. “Each has his own special gift from God” (1 Cor. 7:7)

This does not mean that marriage is in any way disparaged or disdained. It is given by God and is a blessing to those who choose to marry.

The idea, however, that a single person can indulge oneself in the things of this world, including sexuality, and still be the servant of God in Christ is totally rejected and condemned. One can forsake marriage in the body only for greater freedom from “anxiety about worldly affairs” in order to be concerned with “the affairs of the Lord... how to be holy in body and spirit.” The single person who is “holy in body and spirit” has sexual relations with no one.

- 2. Marriage.** Marriage is a part of human life on this earth as created by God. A true Christian marriage is between one man and one woman. Any other type of union that is called “marriage” falls outside of the confines of what the Christian Scriptures define as marriage.

“Therefore, a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh.” (Gen 2:24, Mt. 19:5-6).

God created male and female so that man and woman would live their lives together in marriage as one flesh. This union should be broken for no earthly reason.

They said to Jesus, “Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and to put her away? He said to them, “For your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife except for sexual impurity and marries another, commits adultery.” The disciples said to him, “If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is not expedient to marry.” But he said to them, “Not all men can receive this precept, but only those to whom it is given. For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the Kingdom of heaven. He who is able to receive this, let him receive it.” (Mt. 19:6-12)

Human marriage exists by the will of God on the earth as the created expression of God’s love for man and as man’s participation in the creative love of God. The union of man and woman in the communion of marriage is used in the Bible as the image of God’s faithful love for Israel, and Christ’s sacrificial love for the Church (Isa. 54; Jer. 3; Ezek. 16; Hosea).

“Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the Church, His body, and is Himself its Savior. As the Church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the Church and gave Himself up for her, that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present the Church to Himself in splendor without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. Even so husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ does the Church, because we are members of His body. For this reason, a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one. This is a great mystery, and I take it to mean Christ and the Church; however, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.” (Eph. 5:22-33)

These words of the Apostle Paul contain the whole program for spiritual life in the communion of marriage. The husband must love his wife to the point of death, as Christ loves the Church. And the wife must be totally given to her husband in everything as the Church is given to Christ. The union in love must be perfect, total, complete, enduring and

lasting forever. Within this union, the sexual act of love is the seal of the total union in love; the act whereby the two are united in mind, heart, soul and body in the Lord.

When a man and a woman truly love one another, they naturally desire that their love would be perfect. They want their relationship to be filled with all virtue and every fruit of the Spirit. They want it to be ever more perfectly expressed and fulfilled. They want it to last forever. Those who do not desire such perfection for their love, do not really love.

When a man and woman have such a love, they can find its fulfillment only in Christ. He makes it possible; no one and nothing else can do it. So, for those who love truly, the Savior and accomplisher of their love is Christ. He gives every virtue and every fruit of the Spirit. He allows them to grow ever more perfectly one. He allows them to live and to love for eternity in the Kingdom of God. A marriage in Christ does not end in sin; it does not part in death. It is fulfilled and perfected in the Kingdom of Heaven. It is for this reason, and this reason only, that those who seek true love and perfection in marriage come to the Church to be married in Christ.

A truly Christian and spiritual marriage is one where true love abides. In the communion of marriage true love is expressed in the total union of the couple in all that they are, have, and do. It is the love of each one living completely for the good of the other, the love of sexual union in total oneness of mind, heart and flesh; the love of perfect friendship.

Within such a communion of love, the sexual act is the expression of all of this. It was created for this purpose by God. It is the intimate act which finds its total joy when perfected by those who are fully devoted and dedicated to each other in all things, in every way, forever. It is for this sacred and divine reason that the sexual act cannot be done casually or promiscuously for one's own spiritual or bodily pleasure. It is the act of loving self-sacrifice in eternal fidelity. Only when accomplished in this way does it yield divine satisfaction and infinite delight to the lovers who enact it.

Normally the sexual act in marriage bears fruit in the procreation of children. The marriage ceremony in the Church prays for "purity, a bed undefiled, the procreation of children, and for every earthly blessing." The sexual act of love, however, is not limited merely to the bearing of children. It exists as well for the union in love and the mutual edification and joy of those who are married. If this were not the case, the Apostle Paul would not have given the following counsel:

"... each man should have his own wife, and each wife her own husband. The husband should give the wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. For the wife

does not rule over her own body, but the husband does; likewise, the husband does not rule over his own body, but the wife does. Do not refuse one another except perhaps by agreement for a time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, lest Satan tempt you through lack of self-control.” (1 Cor. 7:2-5)

The apostle does not say that the married couple should be separated and come together only with intentions of bearing a child. He says rather that they should stay together, separating “by agreement, for a time,” and that for the purpose of being devoted “to prayer.” The words “by agreement” are central in this counsel, for each one must live totally as belonging to the other.

Sexuality in pure marriage is pure. For, as the apostle says in another context:

“To the pure, all things are pure, but to the corrupt and unbelieving nothing is pure; their very minds and consciences are corrupted. They profess to know God but they deny Him by their deeds; they are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good deed.” (Titus 1:15-16).

There are those whose marriages are impure because they are corrupt and unbelieving, unfit for any good deed. Even though they are married, and the sexuality is, as they say, “legal,” nevertheless it is ungodly and impure. The fact that two people are “legally married” or even married by a minister in the Church does not make their marital life pure and free from sinful passion, perversion and lust. Only marriages between one man and one woman truly have spiritual life in genuine love and devotion, and those men and women have sexual lives that are holy and pure, mutually satisfying and fulfilling, and well-pleasing to God. This is guaranteed when their spiritual life is in Christ and His Church.