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[Book Review of] *What Is Marriage? Marriage in the Catholic Church*, by Theodore Mackin, S.J.

William F. May

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values of two human lives, for instance, a "rough" comparison of values will not indicate that any one course of action should be clearly followed. The result of this is that the ethical theory presented in this book is useless where it is needed most, in cases where apparently conflictive ethical values are incomparable. The utilitarian and quality-of-life ethic presented here is incapable of giving any direction and guidance where guidance and direction are needed most. The usual result of this is that most will follow their own preferences, prejudices and biases in situations of critical ethical conflict because no clear reason for choosing any one course of action will be offered by the principles.

This work attempts to transform medical-ethical judgments into clinical techniques that are applied to concrete cases in the way that therapeutic techniques are applied. In so doing, much of the dignity of clinical practice is demeaned because it reduces the clinician's commitment to the well-being of the patient to an applied technique that is to be mechanically applied to the various situations that are presented. This work should be read with caution, as its inadequate theoretical framework compromises the suggestions made.

— Robert L. Barry, O.P.
Pope John XXIII Medical-Moral Research Center

What Is Marriage? Marriage in the Catholic Church

Theodore Mackin, S.J.

New York/Ramsey: Paulist Press, 1982, vii + 366 pp., \$11.95.

Mackin has written a very interesting and challenging work. The problem with it, as I hope to show, is that it is predicated upon a misreading both of the Roman Catholic theological tradition and on the teaching set forth at Vatican Council II.

Mackin's principal claim is that a radically new understanding or definition of marriage emerged during the second Vatican Council in the pastoral constitution, *Gaudium et Spes*. This new understanding, which was accepted by Pope Paul VI in *Humanae Vitae*, differs profoundly from the understanding of marriage in the Church from the time of St. Augustine through the great medieval theologians and regnant during the first part of this century, when it was incorporated into the 1917 Code of Canon Law. The older understanding was challenged during the 1930s by writers like Heribert Doms and Dietrick von Hildebrand, and although their challenge was rejected by Pope Pius XII, it was precisely their view of marriage that is central to the teaching of *Gaudium et Spes* (p. 235). This, I believe, is an accurate way to summarize the principal claim of the work.

But what, according to Mackin, is the older understanding or definition of marriage — the one regnant from Augustine until Vatican Council II — and what is the radically new understanding of marriage set forth in *Gaudium et Spes*?

According to Mackin, the older view regarded marriage primarily as a contract between a male and female, obligating them to the pursuit of specific ends. Of these, the primary end was procreating and educating children, while the second

was giving to one another mutual help and allaying concupiscence. On this view, the marriage itself—the contract—was a good of an instrumental kind and ordered to extrinsic goods of a more substantive character, primarily to good of procreation and education.

On the newer view of marriage as set forth in *Gaudium et Spes* marriage is no longer a contract between a male and female but a covenant of love between a man and woman. Thus it is no longer merely an instrumental good, but is something of inherent worth and dignity. The procreation and education of children, still a valuable end toward which the marital covenant is ordered, are no longer the primary end. It shares primacy with the deepening of spousal love. Moreover, Mackin claims, if the deepening of spousal love is of equal value to the procreating and education of children, then it follows that contraception must be morally justifiable for the married if the deepening or fostering of conjugal love requires sexual intimacy at times when it would be irresponsible to beget (cf. pp. 237, 244). Finally, "since, according to *Gaudium et Spes*, a marriage is to be understood as an intimate community of life and marital love, it can dissolve and disintegrate" (p. 315, emphasis added). By this Mackin means that when the love meant to exist between the spouses ceases—for, he contends, the logic of *Gaudium et Spes*'s understanding of marriage requires that one consider love as essential to marriage (p. 332 ff.)—the marriage "dies" or "dissolves." From this it follows, on this new understanding of marriage, the one set forth in *Gaudium et Spes*, that spouses who cease to love each other cease to be spouses and are, accordingly, free to find new spouses.

The foregoing paragraphs summarize Mackin's argument. What now can be said about it?

The first thing that needs to be said about it is that it is predicated upon a serious misreading of the theological tradition. As Mackin presents this tradition, marriage, regarded as the union between husband and wife (their *coniunctio*) is an instrumental good subordinated to substantive or real goods, primarily the procreation and education of children and secondarily, the mutual help of the spouses. Yet the Catholic theological tradition did not regard marriage as a merely instrumental good subordinated to real goods extrinsic to itself. Thomas Aquinas, for instance, along with other great medieval theologians, made it quite clear that the goods perfective of marriage, including the good of procreation and of faithful love between the spouses, are by no means *extrinsic* to the marriage but are rather internal perfections of the marriage itself (cf. *Summa Theologiae*, Supplement, 49, 1, ad 2). For the Catholic theological tradition, the sacrament, or indivisible unity of the spouses rooted in their being, is the good that marriage *is*. The goods of children and of faithful love are not essential to marriage in the sense that the marriage exists even if, tragically, these goods are not realized. Yet these goods are intrinsic perfections of the marriage and *are indeed made possible* by the marriage or sacrament itself. They inwardly perfect the marriage itself and are by no means extrinsic goods to which the marriage is related as a merely instrumental reality (for detailed commentary on this matter see, for instance, Fabian Parmisano, "Love and Marriage in the Middle Ages," *New Blackfriars*, 50, 1969, pp. 599-606, 649-660; Germain G. Grisez, "Marriage: Reflections Based on Thomas Aquinas and Vatican Council II," *The Catholic Mind*, 64, June, 1966, pp. 5-19).

To put matters briefly, Mackin has, in my opinion, *selectively* presented material from the Catholic theological tradition to support his claim that in this tradition marriage was understood as a merely instrumental means to the attainment of substantive goods *extrinsic* to marriage itself. The tradition, properly grasped, taught with great precision that marriage is itself something very good—its essential good being the very *sacramentum* or indissoluble unity of husband and wife—capacitating the spouses to promote other goods, the procreation and education of children and the fostering of faithful love, and that these goods, far

from being extrinsic to the marriage, are intrinsic perfections of it, just as making good moral choices and thinking clearly are intrinsic perfections of the human person.

A second thing that needs to be said about Mackin's argument is that it is predicated upon a serious misreading of *Gaudium et Spes*. According to Mackin this document *rejected* procreation and nurture as a primary end of marriage while retaining it as one essential end among others (see p. 269). Because the document, in Mackin's judgment, rejected the primacy of the procreative end, it made its own the teaching of Doms that had been explicitly repudiated by Pius XII.

This claim on Mackin's part is, I submit, quite false. While *Gaudium et Spes* avoided the use of primary-secondary terminology in speaking of the goods or ends of marriage, it by no means rejected the primacy of procreation when viewing marriage from a certain perspective. To support his claim Mackin finds it helpful to call readers' attention to the editorial footnote of the Abbott edition of the documents of Vatican II in which the editors of this edition insisted that *Gaudium et Spes* wanted to keep this question open (cf. pp. 27, 36). Mackin fails to note that in paragraph 48 the Council Fathers, after noting that God had endowed marriage with various benefits (*bonis*) and ends (*finibus*) in view, itself explicitly refers to the teaching of Augustine, of Pius XI in *Casti Connubii*, and of Aquinas in *Summa Theologiae*, Supplement, q. 49, a. 3, ad 1. Readers who may wish to pursue this footnote will discover that Aquinas in his treatment of the issue, notes that either the sacrament or progeny or faithful love can be called "primary," depending on the perspective from which one is viewing the reality of marriage. And this seems to be precisely the teaching of the Council itself. Moreover, in paragraph 50 of *Gaudium et Spes*, in a passage that Mackin notes and then seeks to explain away as not entailing, at least from some perspective, the primacy of procreation, the Council Fathers insist that the whole aim of marriage itself, of marital love, and the whole meaning of family life deriving therefrom, is ordered to, guess what, the generation and education of children! If this does not mean that the Council Fathers taught that, in some way at any rate, there is a certain primacy of procreation among the goods of marriage, then I find it difficult to understand what they do mean. True, this in no way entails a diminishing of the value of the other ends or goods of marriage, as the Council Fathers say, and indeed if we regard marriage not from the perspective of a community of man and woman summoned to cooperate with God in giving life to new human persons but from other legitimate perspectives from which this community can be viewed, these other ends can be viewed as "primary," just as Aquinas had noted long ago. But to conclude from this that the Council Fathers *reject* with Doms, the idea that the procreation and education of children are primarily what marriage is all about in a very real sense, so much so that even the intimate union of the spouses is itself perfected by their loving begetting, humane nourishing, and Christian educating, is something else. Yet this is what Mackin asserts.

Finally, his contention that this document of Vatican Council II taught that marriages "dissolve and disintegrate" when the intimacy meant to exist between spouses ceases (see p. 315) is surely at odds with the explicit teaching of the document. The Council Fathers make it quite clear that the reality of marriage, the *sacrum vinculum* to use their own language (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 48), comes into being when a man and a woman give consent to marriage and make one another husband and wife by their own personal act of irrevocable consent. They likewise make it quite clear in this very paragraph that the continuation in being of this beautiful reality, this *sacrum vinculum*, is not dependent upon subsequent human choices, but that it perdures so long as the individuals who have made each other irreplaceable spouse-persons by their acts of irrevocable personal consent continue to exist as persons, i.e., until death.

Mackin's work, while quite interesting and indeed very challenging is ultimately quite erroneous. It is so, I suggest, because he has seriously misread both the long Catholic theological tradition concerning marriage and the key document on marriage that issued from Vatican Council II. That document *continues* and *deepens* the traditional understanding of marriage as a human reality of a very specific sort that has God as its author. Human persons enter into this reality when, by free choice, they consent to bring it into being. Once it is in being, they cannot unspouse themselves; and once it is in being they are incapacitated, as spouses, to pursue its goods and bring them into being through their own free choices.

— William F. May
Department of Theology
The Catholic University of America

The Ovulation Method of Natural Family Planning

Book One — Basic Teaching Skills

Thomas Hilgers, M.D., K. Diane Daly, R.N.,
Susan Hilgers, B.A., and Ann Prebil, R.N.

*Creighton University Natural Family Planning Education and Research Center,
601 N. 30th St., Omaha, Neb. 68131, 1982, 214 pp., \$21.95.*

This is the largest and most ambitious manual ever written on natural family planning. It is a standardized case management approach to teaching. One word describes the teaching — PRECISION.

Everyone must understand that Dr. Hilgers believes that the Billings discovery of mucus as an indicator of fertility will rate with the discovery of penicillin as one of the great accomplishments of the 20th century. He says that with enthusiasm, and he trains his teachers in every precise detail of the method.

His goal is to standardize the teaching of natural family planning in the United States. It may take until the 21st century, but I believe Dr. Hilgers will succeed. He lists 12 tools of standardization, 7 qualities of good teachers, and 23 qualities of being professional.

The steps in checking for mucus are: "SOFT" — 1) Sensation, 2) Observation, 3) Finger Testing. There are 22 do's and don'ts about how to check for mucus. Charting seems considerably more complicated than with basic Billings. Words convey ideas. Here, initials convey several concepts. There are a dozen things for a teacher to check in reviewing a chart, and he or she should 1) always use a red pen or pencil, 2) if stamps require changing, place corrections at an angle, and 3) always make corrections together with the client.

There are hints for those coming off the pill, those totally breastfeeding and those partially breastfeeding, those who are premenopausal and those who are infertile.

Dr. Hilgers's teachers use no calendars, thermometers, or cervical examination.

There are three C's of the mucus — consistency, color, change, plus sensation. Follow-up forms are in great detail. Every possible complex situation is given consideration. Nothing is left to chance.