THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF AMERICA

A Methodology for Strengthening Couples’ Relationships Using FOCCUS Prior to Marriage in The Catholic Church

A TREATISE

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By

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Between 1981 and 2006, the divorce rate among adult Catholics in the United States had increased from approximately 16% to 25%. Overall, one-third of married adults have experienced divorce in the U.S. Among the “Baby Boom” generation, the rate is 48%. Recent family and marriage research has identified areas most predictive of marital success, namely: expectations, personality issues, communication, conflict resolution and religious orientation, all influenced, for better or for worse, by one’s family of origin. There is a need, therefore, for premarital preparation to address all of the above to increase the likelihood of marital success. Taking their cue for improved premarital preparation from Blessed Pope John Paul II and the Pontifical Council for the Family’s document, *Preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage*, the Center for Marriage and Family at Creighton University developed a premarital inventory called, *Facilitating Open Couple Communication, Understanding and Study (FOCCUS)*. This inventory has enjoyed wide use around the United States but it was learned that many facilitators of the inventory were not responding to the authors’ recommendation that all responses not coinciding with the “preferred” response be followed up with the couples.
In response to this, the candidate worked with 10 voluntary couples preparing for marriage and went over with each couple each item from their responses to the FOCCUS inventory in which they deviated individually or as a couple from the preferred response. He used as his guides for his interactions with these couples Blessed John Paul II’s *The Acting Person, Love and Responsibility, The Theology of the Body, Human Love in the Divine Plan* and *Familiaris Consortio*.

To validate his work, the candidate asked every individual within the 10 couples to complete the inventory a second time using a T-test to determine the significance of the differences. The results showed a very high significance (p=<0.0005) of learning the preferred response among the individuals of each of the ten couples. Although “social desirability” may have played a role in the responses and the results of having a separate though matched control group of ten couples would have added to the credibility of the overall results, it is believed, nevertheless, that, as a pilot project, this bit of research provides evidence to encourage larger studies in support of the detailed use of the FOCCUS inventory.
This treatise by Henry Kirwan Sweeney, Jr. fulfills the project requirement for the Doctor of Ministry degree with Romuald J. Meogrossi, O.F.M., Conv., Ph.D., as Director, and with William C. Mattison, III, Ph.D., as Reader.

Romuald J. Meogrossi, O.F.M., Conv., Ph.D., Director

William C. Mattison, III, Ph.D., Reader
In thanksgiving to God

For finding my marriage partner

Who has patiently helped me

With this Project,

My wife,

Patricia (“Patita”) Gana Sweeney,

And for our parents

Who remained married to their spouses until death

For over 60 years each
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PART ONE
THEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND OF THE PROJECT
CHAPTER ONE
The need for Premarital Preparation

In the past two decades, in the United States, about one-half of all marriages have ended in divorce and continue to do so at that rate. In many other nations especially the economically developed ones, such as ours in the United States, the number of marriages has decreased (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2010). These facts lead to the pastoral concern: “Are the persons contracting marriage really prepared for it? The problem of sufficient preparation for the sacrament of Marriage and the life that follows emerges as a great pastoral need for the sake of the spouses, for the whole Christian community and for society. Therefore, interest in and initiatives for providing adequate and timely answers to preparation for the sacrament of Marriage are growing everywhere.” This conclusion by the Pontifical Council for the Family led to the publishing, in 1996, of Preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage. The Council had “drawn on the contributions from many apostolic movements, groups and associations working for the pastoral care of the family who have offered their support, advice and experience for the preparation of these guidelines (Pontifical Council for the Family, 1996).” Furthermore, this Pontifical Council for the Family encouraged the use of sciences beyond theology when it said (10): “The very reality of marriage is so rich that it first requires a process of sensitization so that the couple will feel the need to prepare themselves for it. Therefore,
pastoral care of the family should direct its best efforts toward qualifying that preparation, also making use of pedagogical and psychological aids that have a sound orientation.”

The United States’ National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB) has supported a study on the value of marriage preparation in the Catholic Church conducted by the Center for Marriage and Family at Creighton University, entitled: *Marriage Preparation in the Catholic Church: Getting it Right* (1995). This study centered on a personal inventory known as Facilitating Open Couple Communication Understanding and Study (FOCCUS) (Markey & Micheletto, 1985, 2000). Since 1985 this instrument has been widely used in the Catholic Church as well as other religious denominations throughout the world as part of marriage preparation programs. When the Creighton University study was designed, 72,725 couples had, in the years 1987 through 1993, used the FOCCUS inventory as part of their marriage preparation program. Some of the findings from a random sample drawn from this large population concluded: that (1) not only is marriage preparation in the Catholic Church rated as a valuable experience by a vast majority of those who participate in it, but (2) the mandatory nature of marriage preparation in the Catholic Church does not impede the couples’ valuing it highly and that (3) marriage preparation is viewed as most helpful when it deals with the 5 C’s: communication, commitment, conflict-resolution, children and the church (Center for Marriage and Family, 1995). The FOCCUS instrument itself inventories not only the 5 C’s, but it expands into other areas of importance to a marital relationship, including Life Style Expectations, Friends/Interests, Personality Match, Personal Issues, Extended Family, Sexuality Issues, Financial Issues, Readiness Issues and possible added issues, pertinent to a given couple, around Interfaith Marriages, Remarriage and Cohabiting Couples.
The FOCCUS (2000 edition) Facilitator Notebook states, after each member of the couple has separately responded to the inventory, “most of the discussion time is probably best devoted to having the couple talk about items where they were uncertain or disagreed with the preferred response or with each other (pp. 7-8).” However, due to the structure and time constraints of many Pre-Cana and Marriage Preparation Programs, facilitators simply give a summary of a couple’s strengths and areas of concern rather than take the time necessary to work with each couple regarding their uncertainty, disagreement with each other or with the preferred response. Therefore, this writer hopes to demonstrate the value of following the facilitator manual’s expectation of item by item consideration in contrast to simply giving a summary of a couple’s strengths and where they need more work. In this manner a valuable contribution to marriage ministry might be accomplished.

The first part of this paper will provide an in depth consideration of the need for premarital preparation as understood from the documents of Pope John Paul II which support marriage as a sacrament and covenantal relationship. Part Two of this paper will review premarital preparation literature and research. It will center on the research around three commonly used comprehensive premarital assessment instruments, including FOCCUS, and will indicate why these assessment questionnaires have become the most widely used instruments. Part Three will provide a detailed understanding of how this research project supporting item by item consideration of FOCCUS has been implemented. And Part Four will evaluate the results, that is, the measurable differences, between the couples before being exposed to an item by item consideration of their responses as compared to the results of their responses after being exposed
to an item by item discussion of those items wherein they expressed uncertainty, disagreement with each other or disagreement with the preferred response.

In a commemoration of the thirtieth anniversary of the promulgation of *Gaudium et Spes* (*GS*), Pope John Paul II again asserts the theological significance of the fundamental interrogations found in that document which have always concerned the human heart: ‘What is man? What is the meaning of suffering, of evil, of death, that notwithstanding any kind of progress, continue to exist (*GS*, 10)?’ At the time of the document’s being written he was “that young Bishop of Krakow” who “was called to be part of the central subcommission, in charge of formulating the text of this document,” he tells us. Further on in his speech (6.) Pope John Paul II tells us, “But the *Gaudium et Spes* does not limit itself to the base questions. In its desire to render a more concrete service to the man of our times, it also touches upon the immediate problems that assail him. Among these, and with particular relevance is the necessity to promote the dignity and holiness of matrimony and the life of the family.” The Pope concludes this section of his speech (6.) exhorting us: “On many occasions, the Magisterium of the Church in the past, has intervened to restate and illustrate the design of God on marriage and the family. How can we not remember the post-synodal Exhortation *Familiaris consortio* and the initiatives which have marked the recent ‘Year of the Family?’ It is a walk of reflection and of witness which specifically in *Gaudium et Spes* has found a constant and inexhaustible fountain of inspiration” (John Paul II, 1995, 6). We may hereby conclude from John Paul II’s own words that with magisterial continuity the documents, Gaudium et Spes and *Familiaris Consortio*, are most seminal in approaching the Catholic Church’s approach to premarital preparation. And with a subsequent appeal to a further tradition and doctrine relevant to this paper, John Paul II speaks
of (4); and this writer observes that he reiterates a stance taken in the first Vatican Council regarding theology and the other sciences as not conflicting but rather serving each other [First Vatican Council, Session 3: Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith, April 24, 1870, Chapter 4. On faith and reason, esp. no. 1799] (Denzinger, H.J. 1957). John Paul II (1995) in his speech (5.) goes on to say: “I, myself, being in the wake of Gaudium et Spes, have in these years retained it my duty to illustrate in various occasions how notwithstanding the despicable conflicts of the past, that science and faith have no reason of antagonism, rather they extract a reciprocal advantage in their encounter and from mutual collaboration (GS, 36)” (Flannery, A. P., 1996). In a real sense he is summoning the sciences, and perhaps, most appropriately the behavioral sciences such as psychology and sociology and their scientific and statistical methodologies into “mutual collaboration” with our faith as grounded in the Love of Jesus Christ. And thus it is appropriate to use such a scientifically proven instrument as FOCCUS as an aid for facilitating communication, understanding, study and instruction in marriage preparation, most especially, Catholic marriage preparation.

The Pontifical Council for the Family affirms (1996, 20): “Marriage preparation must be set within the urgent need to evangelize culture—by permeating it to its roots (cf. Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Nuntiandi, 19)—in everything that concerns the institution of marriage: making the Christian spirit penetrate minds and behavior, as well as the laws and structures of the community where Christians live (cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, n. 2105). This preparation, both implicitly and explicitly, constitutes one aspect of evangelization, so much so that it can deepen the strength of the Holy Father’s affirmation: ‘The family is the heart of the new evangelization.’ The preparation itself ‘is a responsibility which first concerns married
couples, called to be givers of life, on the basis of an ever greater awareness of the meaning of procreation as a unique event which clearly reveals that human life is a gift received in order then to be given as a gift’ (EV, 92).”

This document (Pontifical Council for the Family, 1996, 20) assures us that the need for such premarital instruction goes beyond religious values and includes the values of “abundant good and values that strengthen solidarity, respect, justice and forgiveness in personal and collective relations” that are derived from marriage and the very foundation of the family. Likewise, the family, based on marriage, “expects from society ‘a recognition of its identity and an acceptance of its status as a subject in society’ (Gratissimam Sane, 17), and therefore to become, ‘the heart of the civilization of love’ (Ibid., 13).” This focus is quite timely since the sacredness of marriage is being assailed in many ways, such as cohabitation with plans not to marry. Marriage was originally understood as a legal status involving one man and one woman; but several states in the United States of America have gradually yielded to allow same sex couples to have their relationships given the status of Marriage!

The Pontifical Council for the Family (1996, 21-59) delineates three stages or periods of preparation for marriage which are (21.), “…not rigidly defined. In fact, they cannot be defined either in relation to the age of the participants, nor in relation to their duration. However, it is useful to be familiar with them as working itineraries and instruments, especially for the content to be transmitted.” They are called remote, proximate and immediate preparation. Remote preparation encompasses infancy, childhood and adolescence which ordinarily take place in the family, the schools and various influential formation groups. The second stage of proximate preparation (32) “…takes place during the period of engagement. It consists of specific courses
and must be distinguished from immediate preparation which is usually concentrated during the last meetings between the engaged and pastoral workers before the celebration of the sacrament. During their proximate preparation, it seems useful to provide the possibility to verify the maturation of the human values pertaining to the relationship of friendship and dialogue that should characterize the engagement.” Such verification and evaluation are part and parcel of the very use of the FOCCUS instrument when used fully as instructed. The Pontifical Council for the Family’s Preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage further states (32): “In view of the new state in life as a couple, the opportunity should be offered to deepen the life of faith, especially regarding knowledge about the sacramentality of the Church. This is an important stage of evangelization in which the faith must involve the personal and community dimensions both of the individual engaged persons and their families. In this process, it will also be possible to identify any difficulties they may have in living an authentic Christian life.” The FOCCUS instrument is useful in identifying the faith issues, family issues and the other important difficult areas of instruction and awareness couples may have in living an authentic Christian life as delineated in this document (35-49). These issues and difficulties can and should be followed up on in the discussions that are considered a part of the FOCCUS process since there are items which pertain to each of these areas.

In the third and final stage of preparation, namely, immediate preparation, it is prescribed by the Pontifical Council (50), that there be “a synthesis of the previous preparation, especially its doctrinal, moral and spiritual content, thus filling in eventual gaps in basic formation. In addition, “experiences of prayer (retreats, spiritual exercises for the engaged) in which the encounter with the Lord can make them discover the depth and beauty of the supernatural life.”
Furthermore, “a suitable liturgical preparation which also envisages the active participation of the engaged, with special attention to the sacrament of Reconciliation” is advised. And, finally, this document instructs that there be “good use of the canonical talks that are envisaged with the parish priest, so that everyone can get to know one another better.” Of course, the administrator and facilitator of the FOCCUS instrument may not be expected to achieve all of these ends of immediate preparation; but it would be good for her/him to be aware of them so as to possibly fill in where s/he becomes aware of gaps in the overall instruction of the couple being prepared for marriage.
CHAPTER TWO
UNDERSTANDING THE “SACRAMENT,” THE “COVENANT” AND SEXUAL ETHICS OF MARRIAGE THROUGH THE WORDS OF POPE JOHN PAUL II

1. Background

In order to better understand how Pope John Paul II stood out as a leader who was to be elected as the next pope after the sudden death of Pope John Paul I, a brief overview of how his thought took shape as a writer, teacher, philosopher and theologian, should be considered. For, although his doctrinal teaching is consistent with his papal predecessors, nevertheless, his manner of approach and delivery may be viewed as refreshingly different and more inviting for consideration in our modern times. He presents our faith as an “experiential reality” (West, C., 2003, p. 35).

Already, as a young man, Karol Wojtyla expressed in his poetry (Wojtyla, K., 1982b) and plays (Wojtyla, K., 1987) “the themes of human experience that will mark his most developed anthropology” (West, C., 2003, p. 35). His vision of man consequently developed further through two doctoral dissertations. First, he observed the faith experience as lived by St. John of the Cross (Wojtyla, 1981a). Through this study of St. John, Wojtyla realized that faith is more than an intellectual assent to objective truths; for the intellect cannot comprehend God who is so very much more than a concept or an object. In passing through the “dark night of the soul”
one’s emotions are cleansed and the intellect submits to love. It is in this love that one experiences God in the mutual self-donation. Wojtyla’s insights received through his study of this Spanish mystic wherein faith becomes the experience of love—love as self-donation, would permeate the rest of his life’s work. Such an insight into faith as an experiential reality also provided an important basis for Wojtyla’s second dissertation on the method of German philosopher, Max Scheler (Wojtyla, 1982a). As a follower of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) who founded the modern philosophical approach called “phenomenology,” Scheler adopted this method of beginning with human experience. In an attempt to offset the ethics of Immanuel Kant which espoused action done solely for the sake of duty and devoid of any subjective or emotionally-felt value, Scheler developed a more humanly holistic ethical system which includes the emotional experience of values. Although Kant tended to ignore the emotional life in favor of duty, Wojtyla, in his first book, *Love and Responsibility* (1981b), corrected Scheler’s opposite tendency of seeing a person as only feeling values by his (Wojtyla’s) added importance of a person’s aspiring to values (virtue). A quotation from Wojtyla’s book (1981b), which followed from his years of keenly sensitive pastoral work with young people, including engaged and married couples, can help to detail this very important distinction:

> Where love between man and woman is concerned we must admit two meanings of the word: love can be understood as a certain situation with a psychological significance, but it also has an ethical significance, and so is connected with a norm [value]. The norm in question here is the personalistic norm: it finds expression in the commandment to love. Situationism, which recognizes no norm, falls into vulgar psychologism in its understanding of love. For love in the psychological sense must be subordinated in man to love in the ethical sense—otherwise there can be no question of integration properly so called. As a result *there is no possibility of psychological completeness in love unless*
*ethical completeness is attained.* Whether we look at love as a concrete situation or as a whole series, a continuum of such situations, all of them separately and together are psychologically complete and ‘integrated’ to the extent that the ethical value of love is present in them. In other words, *love as experience should be subordinated to love as virtue,*—so much so that without love as virtue there can be no fullness in the experience of love. (p. 120)

We could rightly call this philosophical work of Wojtyla’s, *Love and Responsibility* (1981b), a “philosophy of the body” (West, 2003) in that it distinguishes “the way men and women experience their sexual urge, emotion, sensuality, shame, etc., and shows how these can and must be integrated with an ‘education in love.’” For here Wojtyla explains how failure to accept “responsibility for love” turns people into objects to be used rather than individual persons to be loved in their individuality and uniqueness. A woman greatly influenced by this work of Pope John Paul II, Mary Beth Bonacci, who has been a writer and nation-wide speaker in the United States on such values, especially among our youth, amplifies the pope’s message in her book, *Real Love: Answers Your Questions on Dating, Marriage And the Real Meaning of Sex* (1996), when she poses the question, “What do women most want in men?” and responds:

We don’t want just what you think we want—a good-looking guy with a great body who drives a Porsche.

It may sound like a cliché, but most women want a man who loves her and respects her and treasures her; someone who will be trustworthy and who will be a dedicated husband and father. She wants emotional intimacy and companionship and support. She wants someone who is emotionally healthy and who won’t flake out when times get tough. She wants someone who loves her in particular and not just women in general. She wants a loving, lifetime partner.  

(p.241)
After Vatican Council II Wojtyla found time to write *The Acting Person* (1979a) as an exploration of the philosophical foundations of the conciliar documents. The purpose of this compact philosophical anthropology is to join a traditional realist philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas with the modern turn to the subject as with Max Scheler. His synthesis, as the title of his work indicates, is the finding that the very core of the person is manifested by his actions. He states in summary (p. 300):

> The theme of this study has been the person who reveals himself in and through the action, who reveals himself through all the psychosomatic conditionings that are simultaneously his wealth and his specific limitation. This is why the person manifests not only his transcendence in the action but also his integration appropriate to the action; it is the integration and not beyond or above it that the dynamic reality of the action is constituted. The person, who manifests himself through the action, so to speak, permeates and simultaneously encompasses the whole psychosomatic structure of his own subject.

As it would apply to marriage Wojtyla therefore believes that there is a law of self-donation that defines the person objectively; and it is in the experience of one’s own freedom to choose how to give of oneself, to act on behalf of one’s marriage partner, that one comes to experience and appreciate the truth of one’s personhood subjectively.

Although his work, *The Acting Person* (1979a), provided a philosophical basis for the Council’s task of making the objective truths of faith an experience of life, bringing about their subjective appropriation, Wojtyla’s book, *Sources of Renewal* (1979c), facilitated the Council’s pastoral realization. Here Cardinal Wojtyla tells us that the “proof of the realization of the Council” will be evident when “the doctrine of faith and morals” that the Council provided “is manifest in the consciousness of Christians.” The Council therefore presented “an enrichment of faith in the objective sense, constituting a new stage in
the Church’s advance toward ‘the fullness of divine truth.’” But what is even more hoped for as an offspring of the Council, and what *Sources of Renewal* intends to help on its way “is an enrichment [of faith and morals] in the subjective, human, existential sense” (Wojtyla, 1979c, pp.17-18). The most important and not-to-be-neglected element in all of this, he preached in a lenten retreat to Pope Paul VI and the Roman Curia in 1976 (1979b), is Christ, a *Sign of Contradiction*, as he titled these twenty-two conferences. His conclusion was that, “For just such a time as this we have been given the sign: Christ, ‘sign of contradiction’ (Lk 2:34). And the woman clothed with the sun: ‘A great sign in the heavens’ (Rev 12:1)” (p. 206). “The signs Wojtyla spoke of are those of a man and a woman—the New Adam and the New Eve” (West, 2003, p. 39).

2. The Church’s Sexual Ethic—Liberal and Conservative

The Church, in following her Bridegroom, cannot be more of a “sign of contradiction” than in her teaching on man and woman’s relationship. This writer agrees with West (2003, p. 39) that “nowhere is there more of a disconnection between Church doctrine and the consciousness of Christians than in the Church’s sexual ethic.” This writer experienced this disconnection especially when the encyclical, *Humanae Vitae*, was promulgated (Paul VI, 1968) wherein the Church’s doctrine against the use of artificial means for birth control was reconfirmed. From this writer’s perspective there were, at that time in the United States and continue to be, many people in the Catholic Church today who like to consider themselves to be either “conservatives” or “liberals.” This is probably an oversimplification, but “conservatives” believe that the Catholic Church’s ordinary magisterial teachings on faith and morals will never change substantially, although they might develop in their detail and presentation, whereas, “liberals” apparently believe that since so many things seemed to have changed with the Vatican Council II regarding the liturgy (now in the vernacular language of the people), Friday fasting as no longer obligatory, and many other disciplinary law types of changes, which were welcome and popular changes,
that this would, therefore, lead to the Catholic Church’s support for the sexual liberality that would allow artificial birth control which had become commonplace in the society in which we Catholics are living. Although the authority of ordinary magisterial documents written as “encyclicals,” such as *Humanae Vitae*, was well established, this writer believes, within an encyclical, namely, *Humani Generis* (20) by Pope Pius XII in 1950; nevertheless, the arguments regarding artificial versus natural means of birth control have continued among lay people and theologians. It is interesting, however, to see how one such theologian (McCormick, R. A., 1993) writing about “‘Humanae Vitae’ 25 Years Later”, concludes his article in the *America* magazine by pointing out:

…that there are abiding substantial values that all disputants share and want to protect: the holiness of marriage, generous and responsible openness to life, the human character of the expression of married love, the fidelity and stability of marriage and respect for life. If these get lost in debate about the means of birth regulation, as I fear they may have, then to the malaise of polarization will have been added the tragedy of irrelevance. The means-question will have smothered the more basic message, a state of affairs from which only the Spirit can deliver us.

In a similar, but somewhat contrasting approach, written nearly eight years before *Humanae Vitae*, the later to be named, Cardinal, Leon Joseph Suenens, had written a work titled, *Love and Control: The Contemporary Problem* (December, 1960). Centering beyond the overly-simplistic labels of “liberal” or “conservative,” potential extremes, either of which may be overlooking “the truth” with some preordained bias, he tells us (p. 100), “The only attitude worthy of a man and a Christian is the one that depends upon reason and faith in performing the act which is a supreme collaboration with God.”

Perhaps deeply influenced by the above-quoted work of Suenens (1960) which this writer read many years ago, when people ask this writer whether he is “a liberal” or “a conservative,” in his tendency to shun such labels, he simply states, with a smile, “Neither, I am a seeker of the truth.” This is the
reasoning part of this writer summed up in the word, “truth.” And if pressed to get to the believing, or faith part of this writer, he confesses to believing that the Holy Spirit, “the Spirit of Truth” is ultimately guiding the Catholic Church and its “Rock” to “the truth,” which is not always simple to discern—especially where the influences of our Playboy/Playgirl culture, that may be seen as a reaction to the sexual repression that Sigmund Freud uncovered in the social culture of his day, is now resulting in a sexual hedonism that, practically speaking, ignores the life-giving end of the sexual act, thus giving a total sanctioning of any form of birth control.

Suenens (1960, pp. 100-102) further elaborates that: “Human prudence, the virtue which is the usual way in which the will of Providence is expressed, should direct and lead instinct instead of letting it go on its own blind way. Conjugal love should be ordered; that is, it should be deliberate and the fruit of reflection and decision. Man’s dignity demands that he co-operate with God’s creative act with full deliberation. God gets no honour from an unthinking submission to instinct, but from a complete and perfect submission to his law, His whole law.” Suenens was ahead of our times in trying to re-instill the nature of “virtue” at the center of truth, that is, our efforts to get as close to the truth (virtually) as we humanly and spiritually can. He adds, “Prudence means ‘doing truth’ in concord with all one’s obligations. It means choosing from the entirety of complex reality what is most in line with God’s whole plan for us. Prudence has to be vivified from within by the gifts of wisdom and counsel and this is why Christian families will take their decisions to prayer.”

Interestingly, from a time-line perspective, in the same year as Suenens work, Love and Control, 1960, Karol Wojtyla (Pope John Paul II) published in Polish, his book, later to be translated into English and titled, Love and Responsibility (1960, English translation 1981). The titles of these works themselves carry a parallel resemblance. However, Wojtyla comfortably moves into the science of psychology and its terms to elucidate to his contemporaries a cognitive/behavioral understanding of “The Problem of Integrating Love,” as he captioned one section of his work (p.114). Providentially this approach to psychotherapy had become fine-tuned and grew in popularity and success among psychologists also, in
the 1960s, in the United States (National Association of Cognitive-Behavioral Therapists, 2008). And it appears to this writer to be the most used and successful of approaches in our time. Wojtyla tells us that (p.114), “Looked at in terms of psychology, love can be seen as a specific situation. It is on the one hand an internal situation, existing in a particular subject, and it is simultaneously a situation between two persons, a woman and a man. But whether we think of its internal or its external aspect it is a concrete situation, and therefore unique and irreproducible [sic, irreproducible]. The external concreteness and uniqueness of the situation which we call love is closely connected with its internal aspect, with what is within each of the persons, who are as it were actors in the drama of their own love.” Wojtyla’s underlying personalist philosophy approach is well-demonstrated here. He continues (p.114), “Love is certainly a drama in the sense that it is made up of happenings and of action (to do, to act is the meaning of the Greek word ‘drap’ from which ‘drama’ comes). Thus, the ‘dramatis personae’ discover the plot of this drama in themselves, perceive their love as a psychological situation unique of its kind, and one of great and absorbing importance in their inner lives. A person is, of course, among all the varied objects of the visible world, that unusual one which is endowed with an inner self of its own, and is capable of an inner life.” Wojtyla is, of course, speaking here of our unique human ability to be self-reflective in our thoughts and regarding our actions. He goes on to tell us that psychology, as originally (classically) understood, is the “science of the soul” which “endeavors to lay bare the structure and the foundations of man’s inner life. Its investigations serve to confirm that the most significant characteristics of that inner life are the sense of truth and the sense of freedom (pp. 114-115).” Of course there are many psychologists and psychiatrists in our day who, when they see what appear to be conflicts between truth and freedom, rather than trying to reconcile the two through further research and study, may, for example, opt out of considering an issue such as homosexuality, as any longer being seen as an identity or developmental disorder, but yield to the “political correctness” (liberal—“freedom first” side of things) pressures of the times disregarding contrary and even contradictory evidence (van den Aardweg, G., 1985; Nicolosi, J., 1991); and Wojtyla continues (p.115): “Truth is directly connected with the sphere of
cognition. Human cognition does not consist merely in reflecting or producing ‘mirror images’ of objects, but is inseparable from awareness of truth and falsehood. This it is that constitutes the innermost and most important nerve in the human cognitive process. If cognition consisted only in ‘reflecting’ objects one might suspect that it was material in character.” At this point, Wojtyla references his work, *The Acting Person*, (1979a, pp. 41-59), for a more detailed examination of consciousness and its reflexive function. He importantly adds, “But awareness of truth and falsehood lies altogether outside the boundaries of that which matter can furnish.” He goes to the heart of the relationship between truth and freedom when he states (p. 114): “Truth is a condition of freedom, for if a man can preserve his freedom in relation to the objects which thrust themselves on him in the course of his activity as good and desirable, it is only because he is capable of viewing these goods in the light of truth and so adopting an independent attitude to them. Without this faculty man would inevitably be determined by them: these goods would take possession of him and determine totally the character of his actions and the whole direction of his activity. His ability to discover the truth gives man the possibility of self-determination, of deciding for himself the character and direction of his own actions, and that is what freedom means.” In other words and additionally, the sense of one’s own character will psychologically be experienced through that degree of truth—the whole truth and nothing but the truth or something considerably less—which one freely, albeit influenced by one’s passions, fears, force and/or ignorance, chooses into. So truly being “liberal” means always free to choose the truth; and truly being “conservative” can only mean conserving and standing by what one believes to be the truth. They, “liberalism” and “conservatism,” can only be seen as polar opposites when they become ends in themselves and fail to serve the truths that support Christian virtue by respectfully integrating the love-giving/life-giving aspects of human sexuality. Objectively, there is no room for moral relativism; for, whatever decisions a human makes, the more values that are encompassed in the decision the more virtuous it is. And a most basic classic law in logic, that will eternally hold true, is the Law of Non-contradiction, explicitly, that a thing cannot both be and not be at the same time and in the same respect. Whereas, subjectively, when we fail to follow the virtuous path, as John Paul II tells us
(1980, 15) of a God who is “Rich in Mercy;” “The more the human conscience succumbs to secularization, loses its sense of the very meaning of the word ‘mercy,’ moves away from God and distances itself from the mystery of mercy, the more the Church has the right and the duty to appeal to the God of mercy ‘with loud cries.’ These ‘loud cries’ should be the mark of the Church of our times, cries uttered to God to implore His mercy, the certain manifestation of which she professes and proclaims as having already come in Jesus crucified and risen, that is, in the Paschal Mystery. It is this mystery which bears within itself the most complete revelation of mercy, that is, of that love which is more powerful than death, more powerful than sin and every evil, the love which lifts man up when he falls into the abyss and frees him from the greatest threat.”

3. Marriage as a Sacrament

Before becoming Pope, Wojtyla recognized that, if the Second Vatican Council was to take root, a bridge would have to be built that would enable Christians to personally identify with and live fully God’s plan for human sexuality. In an essay on marriage and the family, written in 1974 (Wojtyla, K., Person & Community), he asserted the need for “a special theology of the body, so to speak (p.326).” Some years later, as Cardinal Wojtyla, he began working on this, one of the most widely recognized works of his life. It is a biblical, theological deliberation on the human body and sexuality elucidated by the philosophy of the human person he had developed during his academic and pastoral experiences. He could not have known, of course, that he would complete this “theology of the body” as Pope John Paul II and bring it to the world as his first major papal catechetical undertaking giving it a papal and magisterial status of great import for the universal Church. Presented in general audiences between September 1979 and November 1984, these audiences may be summarized as a catechesis on the bodily dimension of human personhood, sexuality and marriage in the light of biblical revelation.

In his general audience of July 28, 1982, well into his series of catecheses referred to as the “theology of the body” John Paul II (1997, pp. 304-309) names this presentation, The Sacramentality of
Marriage, followed by a subtitle, “Marital Love Reflects God’s Love for His People.” He then begins to extract this reflection as it is derived from the words of St. Paul to the Ephesians (Eph 5:21-33). In forming an analysis, John Paul poses the question, “…in this classic text of Ephesians, how does the truth about the sacramentality of marriage emerge?” And, “In what way is it expressed and confirmed there (p. 305)?” He acknowledges that, “…the answers to these questions cannot be immediate and direct, but gradual and long-term.” He says: “This is proved even at a first glance at this text, which brings us back to Genesis and therefore to ‘the beginning.’ In the description of the relationship between Christ and the Church, this text takes from the writings of the Old Testament prophets the well-known analogy of the spousal love between God and his chosen people.” John Paul II also acknowledges that, “…the answer we are seeking must pass through the whole sphere of the questions previously analyzed, that is, through the theology of the body (p.305).” As a way of defining the sacrament or the sacramentality, in a more general sense, it “meets with the body and presupposes the theology of the body. According to the generally known meaning, the sacrament is a visible sign. The body also signifies that which is visible.” He elaborates, “It signifies the visibility of the world and of man. Therefore, in some way, even if in the most general way, the body enters the definition of sacrament, being ‘a visible sign of an invisible reality,’ that is, of the spiritual, transcendent, divine reality (p. 305).”

After several general audiences later (February 9, 1983) John Paul II goes deeper into his analyses, as promised, regarding marriage as a sacrament (p.367):

By means of the dimension of the sign proper to marriage as a sacrament there is confirmed the specific theological anthropology, the specific hermeneutics of man. In this case it could also be called the hermeneutics of the sacrament, because it permits us to understand man on the basis of the analysis of the sacramental sign. Man—male and female—as the minister of the sacrament, the author (co-author) of the sacramental sign, is a conscious and capable subject of self-determination. Only on this basis can he be the author of the language of the body, the author (co-author) of marriage as a sign—a sign of the divine creation and redemption of the body. The fact
that man (male and female) is the man of concupiscence does not prejudice his capacity to reread the language of the body in truth. He is the man of concupiscence. But at the same time he is capable of discerning truth from falsity in the language of the body. He can be the author of the meanings of that language, whether true or false.

While alluding to natural law in speaking “of discerning truth from falsity in the language of the body,” John Paul II appears to avoid what might have been felt by many, coming from Paul VI’s emphasis on natural law in his encyclical, *Humanae Vitae*, as a more sterile and less feeling negative approach of “Thou shalt not, because…” Whereas John Paul II in his more personalistic approach of, first, affirming the language of the bodies of men and women, draws married people into identity with the great value and attraction of this most important sacramental union, and he is coming across more positively with an approach of “Thou shalt because you can make this great and beautiful and sensuous value of the sacrament of marriage even more beautiful, virtuous and integrated as you…” This pedagogical approach becomes even more evident as John Paul II invokes the words of the Song of Songs (p. 369): “Even a summary analysis of the text of the Song of Songs allows the language of the body to be heard expressing itself in that mutual fascination. The point of departure as well as the point of arrival for this fascination—mutual wonder and admiration—are in fact the bride’s femininity and the groom’s masculinity, in the direct experience of their visibility.” He goes on to tell us that the words of love that they speak to one another are focused on each other’s bodies not only because their bodies are the source “of the mutual fascination,” but also, “and above all,” because “on the body there lingers directly and immediately that attraction toward the other person, toward the other ‘I’—female or male—which in the interior impulse of the heart generates love.” John Paul II affirms the intent of this scripture as love unleashing “a special experience of the beautiful” in that it focuses on what is visible while at the same time involving the entire person. “The experience of beauty gave rise to mutual satisfaction.” He goes on to exemplify this with the poem writer’s own words, “‘O most beautiful among women….’” (Sg
1:8), the groom says, and the bride’s words echo back to him: ‘I am dark—but lovely, O daughters of Jerusalem’ (Sg1:5). The words of the spellbound man are repeated continually. They return in all five stanzas of the poem, and they are echoed in similar expressions of the bride’s (General audience of May 23, 1984).” John Paul II resumes (p. 370) the catechetical analysis of the Song of Songs in his next general audience of May 30, 1984 for “the purpose of understanding in a more adequate and exhaustive way the sacramental sign of marriage.” He, again, views this as a manifestation “by the language of the body, a singular language of love originating in the heart.” He tells us that the Song of Songs writer has the groom “expressing a particular experience of values that shines upon everything that relates to the person he loves….. ‘You have ravished my heart, my sister, my bride; you have ravished my heart with one glance of your eyes, with one bead of your necklace. How sweet are your caresses, my sister, my bride…..(Sg 4:9-10).’ From these words emerges what is of essential importance for the theology of the body—and in this case for the theology of the sacramental sign of marriage—to know who the female ‘you’ is for the male ‘I’ and vice versa.” In his next General audience (June 6, 1984) John Paul II asserts that man and woman cannot have their spiritual and sensual natures separated in reality as though they can be disembodied spirits. He says (p. 373): “The bride knows that the groom’s longing is for her and she goes to meet him with the quickness of the gift of herself (cf. Sg 7:9-13) because the love that unites them is at one and the same time of a spiritual and of a sensual nature. It is also on the basis of this love that the rereading of the significance of the body in the truth comes to pass, since the man and woman must together constitute that sign of the mutual gift of self, which puts the seal on their whole life.”

In further analysis of the Song of Songs, John Paul II tells us (pp. 374-375) that we only have to follow “the paths of the words of these strophes when it seems we approach a height at which eros requires integration with yet “another truth about love. Centuries later, in the light of the death and resurrection of Christ, Paul of Tarsus will proclaim this truth in the words of First Corinthians:

Love is patient; love is kind.

Love is not jealous; it does not put on airs; it is not snobbish.
Love is never rude; it is not self-seeking; it is not prone to anger; neither does it brood over injuries.

Love does not rejoice in what is wrong but rejoices with the truth.

There is no limit to love’s forbearance, to its trust, its hope, its power to endure.

Love never fails (1 Cor 13:4-8).”

To emphasize his view of the great importance of this above writing of St. Paul, John Paul II, in his Letter to Families (1994), in the declared Year of the Family, said that this “hymn to love in the First Letter to the Corinthians remains the Magna Charta of the civilization of love.”

Continuing with the pope’s General audience of June 6, 1984, he tells us (p. 375), “it seems,” with the above text of St. Paul, “that love opens up before us here in two perspectives. It is as though that in which the human eros closes its horizon is still opened, through Paul’s words, to another horizon of love that speaks another language, the love that seems to emerge from another dimension of the person, and which calls, invites, to another communion. This love has been called agape and agape brings the eros to completion by purifying it.” Some theologians might question here as to whether eros needs to be “purified” as a manichaeistic tendency among some to look at whatever is sensual, which is made so by God, as in need of “purification,” implying that it is in some way “dirty.” Perhaps the pope’s previously saying above that “eros requires integration” would have the pope preferably saying, “agape brings the eros to completion by integrating it.” But it appears that even St. Paul may have “fallen short” with a type of dualistic thinking earlier in his First Letter to the Corinthians (7:1-9). St. Paul starts out (vs. 1), “Now for the matters you wrote about. A man is better off having no relations with a woman.” How does this fit in with a positive attitude toward God’s creation of sexuality in man and telling him (man and woman) in Genesis to increase and multiply, that is, to use this sexuality-- this sensuality? Paul’s negative approach seems to be persistent in verse 2 where he says, “But to avoid immorality, every man should have his own wife and every woman her own husband.” Would it not have been better for him to have said something
to the effect that, the strong sexual drive that one may have should be seen as a gift for discernment that you are being called to be married? However, although somewhat negatively from a standpoint of “self-control” rather than “a desire for perfecting virtue,” in subsequent verses (vss. 3-8), St. Paul seems to finally imply the strength of one’s sexuality as an issue for discernment of the vocation “to marry” when he says (vs. 9), “but if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. It is better to marry than to be on fire (The New American Bible translation (NAB)).”

The more positive approach that Pope John Paul II uses for the most part in his “theology of the body” certainly appears to this writer to be the right pedagogical approach to use with the faithful in order to have them identify rightly their sexuality as a sacramental gift and to help close the credibility gap as to whether a celibate clergy can understand and lead them to a greater spiritualization of this great call, gift and sacrament that God has given them.

4. Marriage as a Covenant

John Paul II tells us (p. 376) that the spouses of the Song of Songs appear to be living and speaking to each other “in an ideal or abstract world, in which it is as though the struggle of the objective forces between good and evil did not exist. Is it not precisely the power and the interior truth of love that subdues the struggle that goes on in man and around him?” He continues to tell us that the completeness of such truth and power is different as can be experienced in reading the Book of Tobit. Here “the truth and the power of love” are demonstrated in placing oneself between the forces of good and evil which are warring within and around man, but love has confidence to be victorious for the good and is prepared to do whatever it takes so that good may win out in the end. The language of the body as spoken here seems “to use the words of the choices and the acts stemming from the love that is victorious because it prays.” The prayer of Tobiah (Tb 8:5-8), more a prayer of thanksgiving and praise than of petition, places the language of the body “on the level of the essential terms of the theology of the body. It is an ‘objectivized’ language, pervaded not so much by the emotive power of the experience as by the depth
and gravity of the truth of the experience” (p.377). Tobiah and Sarah stand in unison and profess this truth together before the God of the covenant, the “God of our fathers.” In this respect the language of the body becomes the language of the sacrament, aware that in this conjugal covenant “the mystery that has its origin in God himself is expressed and realized. Their conjugal pact is the image—and the original sacrament of the covenant of God with man, with the human race—of that covenant which took its origin from eternal Love.” Tobiah and Sarah conclude their prayer with the following words: “Call down your mercy on me and on her, and allow us to live together to a happy old age” (Tb 8:7). Here we can see realized from previous general audiences of John Paul II, January 12th and January 19th (pp. 357-363): “that the language of the body also enters essentially into the structure of marriage as a sacramental sign, we refer to a long biblical tradition. This has its origin in Genesis (especially 2:23-25) and it finds its definitive culmination in Ephesians (cf. Eph 5:21-33).” And he acknowledges that the prophets of the Old Testament were an essential ingredient to forming this tradition. If we examine the books of Hosea, Ezekiel, Deutero-Isaiah, and of the other prophets, we come “face to face with the great analogy whose final expression is the proclamation of the new covenant [emphasis added] under the form of a marriage between Christ and the Church (cf. Eph 5:21-33).” The analogy may be seen as having two levels. First, the prophets present the covenant between God and Israel as a marriage, thus allowing us to understand marriage as a covenant between husband and wife (cf Prv 2:17; Mal 2:14) (p. 358). The covenant here comes from God’s initiative toward the people of Israel. Our Creator and Lord made this first covenant with Abraham and then with Moses. It was a special and persevering choice, like that a couple makes in the covenant of marriage. In choosing Israel, God bound himself with a profoundly personal bond. Israel, although a nation of people, is thus presented in this understanding of the covenant, as a spouse, and therefore, analogously as a person. John Paul II then contrasts a second level (p. 358): “Given that the covenant of Yahweh with Israel has the character of a spousal bond like to the conjugal pact, that first level of the analogy reveals a second which is precisely the language of the body. Here we have in mind, in the first place, the language in an objective sense. The prophets compare the covenant to marriage.”
They are referring to “the primordial sacrament spoken of in Genesis 2:24, in which the man and the woman, by free choice, become ‘one flesh.’” The prophets then pass at the same time to “the language of the Body” in its “subjective meaning.” “It speaks ultimately—and this happens more frequently—both in the language of fidelity, that is, of love, and also in the language of conjugal infidelity, that is, of adultery (p.359).” Pope John Paul II emphasizes this aspect of covenantal love further on when he says, “As the inspired mouthpieces of the covenant of Yahweh with Israel, the prophets seek precisely through this language of the body to express both the spousal profundity of the aforesaid covenant and all that is opposed to it. They speak therefore according to ethical categories, setting moral good and evil in mutual opposition (p. 360). The opposition between good and evil is essential for morality.” Further on he adds, “We can then say that the essential element for marriage as a sacrament is the language of the body in its aspects of truth. Precisely, by means of that, the sacramental sign is constituted.” In a subsequent general audience titled, The Sacramental Covenant in the Dimension of Sign (January 19, 1983), Pope John Paul II concludes (p. 363): “In this truth of the sign and, later, in the morality of matrimonial conduct, the procreative significance of the body is inserted with a view to the future—that is, paternity and maternity….” In the marriage ceremony, by way of emphasis, the Pope affirms the required response, “To the question: ‘Are you willing to accept responsibly and with love the children that God may give you and to educate them according to the law of Christ and of the Church?’—the man and the woman reply: ‘Yes.’”

5. Enhancements of *Humanae Vitae*

After the many general audiences on “the theology of the body” and its value as sacrament and covenant, as briefly summarized by this writer, Pope John Paul II, in his final general audiences in this series titled, *Reflections on “Humanae Vitae,”* presents a synthesis between his personalistic “theology of the body” as virtuous with Pope Paul VI’s emphasis on the norm of the natural law as established by the
Creator with regard to birth control. He thus enhances pedagogically the depth of meaning of this encyclical. John Paul II tells us that (p. 400): “Even though the periodicity of continence in this case is applied to the so-called ‘natural rhythms’ (HV 16), the continence itself is a definite and permanent moral attitude. It is a virtue, and therefore the whole line of conduct guided by it acquires a virtuous character. The encyclical emphasizes clearly enough that here it is not merely a matter of a definite technique, but of ethics in the strict sense of the term as the morality of conduct. Therefore, the encyclical opportune ly sets out in relief, on the one hand, the necessity to respect in the above-mentioned line of conduct the order established by the Creator, and on the other hand, the necessity of an immediate motivation of an ethical character.”

John Paul II follows by quoting Paul VI regarding the first aspect: “‘To experience the gift of married love while respecting the laws of conception is to acknowledge that one is not the master of the sources of life, but rather the minister of the design established by the Creator’ (HV 13).” He then tells us, “‘Human life is sacred’—as our predecessor of holy memory, John XXIII, said in his encyclical Mater et Magistra—‘from its very beginning it involves directly the creative action of God’ (AAS 53, 1961; cf. HV 13). As regards the immediate motivation, Humanae Vitae requires that ‘there exist reasonable grounds for spacing birth, arising from the physical or psychological condition of husband or wife, or from external circumstances…’ (HV 16).” By way of further explication of what Paul VI is quoted as saying and providing a biblical synthesis, John Paul II tells us (p. 401): “In the case of a morally upright regulation of fertility effected by means of periodic continence, one is clearly dealing with the practice of conjugal chastity, that is, of a definite ethical attitude. In biblical language we could say that it is a case of living by the Spirit (cf. Gal 5:25).”

John Paul II goes on to explain Paul VI’s above statements in Humanae Vitae: “The morally correct regulation is also called ‘the natural regulation of fertility,’ which can be explained as conformity to the natural law. By natural law we mean that order of nature in the field of procreation, insofar as it is understood by right reason. This order is the expression of the Creator’s plan for man.” He then makes
sure to tell us that, “It is precisely this that the encyclical, together with the whole Tradition of Christian teaching and practice, stresses in a particular way:…” But at this point again we see John Paul II adding his “virtue”-related and “personalized” emphases when he continues, “the virtuous character of the attitude which is expressed in the natural regulation of fertility is determined not so much by fidelity to an impersonal natural law as to the Creator-Person, the Source and Lord of the order which is manifested in such a law.” In a later general audience, October 24, 1984 (p. 408), John Paul II further considers aspects of continence, that is, the periods of abstinence required when using the accepted natural method of birth control, by again referring to them in terms of character-building and virtue. He tells us: “Continence consists in the capacity to dominate, control and direct drives of a sexual character (concupiscence of the flesh) and their consequences, in the psychosomatic subjectivity of man. Insofar as it is a constant disposition of the will, this capacity merits being called a virtue.” Further along he adds, “This virtue is seen to be the fundamental condition for the reciprocal language of the body to remain in the truth and for the couple to ‘defer to one another out of reverence for Christ,’ according to the words of Scripture (Eph 5:21). This ‘deferring to one another’ means the common concern for the truth of the language of the body. Rather, deferring ‘out of reverence for Christ’ indicates the gift of the fear of God (a gift of the Holy Spirit) which accompanies the virtue of continence.” John Paul II makes it even clearer that he is purposely enhancing the depth and understanding of this encyclical when he states (p. 409): “The conviction that the virtue of continence is set against the concupiscence of the flesh is correct, but it is not altogether complete. It is not complete especially when we take into account the fact that this virtue does not appear and does not act abstractly and therefore in isolation. But it always appears and acts in connection with the other virtues (nexus virtutum), and therefore in connection with prudence, justice, fortitude and above all with charity.” A little later in his talk, he adds: “Therefore, that asceticism of continence, which the encyclical speaks of (cf. HV 21), does not impoverish affective manifestations. But rather it makes them spiritually more intense and therefore enriches them.”
Later (p.412), and again using currently accepted terms in the field of psychology, John Paul II makes some insightful observations: “In interpersonal relationships in which the mutual influence of masculinity and femininity is expressed, there is freed in the psycho-emotive subject in the human ‘I,’ alongside a reaction distinguishable as excitement, another reaction that can and must be called emotion. Although these two kinds of reaction appear joined, it is possible to distinguish them experimentally and to differentiate them with regard to their content or their object.” Here he adds a footnote (p. 423, 111) telling us to recall what St. Thomas says in a final analysis of human love “in relation to the ‘concupiscible’ and to the will (cf. *Summa Theol.*, I-II, q. 26, art. 2).” He continues, “The objective difference between the one and the other kind of reaction consists in the fact that the excitement is above all corporeal and in this sense sensual. On the other hand, even though aroused by the mutual reaction of masculinity and femininity, emotion refers above all to the other person understood in the person’s integrality. We can say that this is an emotion caused by the person, in relation to the person’s masculinity or femininity.” He then summarizes and concludes: “What we are stating here with regard to the psychology of the mutual reactions of masculinity and femininity helps in understanding the role of the virtue of continence, which we spoke about previously. Continence is not only, and not even principally, the ability to abstain, that is, mastery over the multiple reactions that are interwoven in the mutual influences of masculinity and femininity. Such a role would be defined as negative.” And here is his important distinction between a sense of accomplishment based solely on self-control for its own sake, “a biting the bullet,” so to speak, and being drawn to this ideal whereby he concludes, “But there is also another role (which we can call positive) of self-mastery. It is the ability to direct the respective reactions, both as to their content and their character.” As a more explicit application of the above psychological analyses, he, further on (p. 413), adds: “Excitement seeks above all to be expressed in the form of sensual and corporeal pleasure. That is, it tends toward the conjugal act which (depending on the natural cycles of fertility) includes the possibility of procreation. On the other hand, emotion, caused by another human being as a person, even if in its emotive content it is conditioned by the femininity or masculinity of the
‘other,’ does not per se tend toward the conjugal act.” And at this juncture John Paul II is incisive regarding his conclusions, “But it limits itself to other manifestations of affection, which express the spousal meaning of the body, and which nevertheless do not include its (potentially) procreative meaning. It is easy to understand what conclusions arise from this with respect to the question of responsible fatherhood and motherhood. These questions are of a moral nature.” More personally, this writer can attest to the satisfaction of these “other manifestations of affection” as well as a “virtuous” sense of his “responsible fatherhood.”

6. Conclusions

In his concluding statements made in his last general audience of this series (November 28, 1984) John Paul II tells us (p.421): “The reflections we made consist in facing the questions raised with regard to Humanae Vitae. The reaction that the encyclical aroused confirms the importance and the difficulty of these questions.” He goes on to say that the “Apostolic Exhortation Familiaris Consortio (John Paul II, 1982) fruit of the 1980 Synod of Bishops on ‘The Role of the Christian Family,’ confirms it.” However, there is further admission that, pedagogically speaking, there must be more and deeper ways of expressing the contents of the encyclical so as to help draw more people into understanding and conformation to this document. For, John Paul II states, “The document [Familiaris Consortio] contains an appeal, directed especially to theologians, to elaborate more completely the biblical and personalistic aspects of the doctrine contained in Humanae Vitae.” This is exactly what John Paul II has done in his catecheses developing “the theology of the body” over the first span of general audiences presented followed by the second grouping of general audiences more directly applied to Humanae Vitae itself in which he further expands the personalistic and biblical contexts from which the doctrine acquires even more significance. As John Paul II explains it (p. 421), “The analysis of the biblical aspects speaks of the way to place the doctrine of today’s Church on the foundation of revelation. This is important for the development of theology. Development, that is, a progress in theology, takes place through a continual
restudying of the deposit of revelation.” But in the next paragraph he tells us, “The rooting of the doctrine proclaimed by the Church in all of Tradition and in divine revelation itself is always open to questions posed by man. It also uses the instruments most in keeping with modern science and today’s culture. It seems that in this area the intense development of philosophical anthropology (especially the anthropology that rests on ethics) most closely faces the questions raised by *Humanae Vitae* regarding theology and especially theological ethics.” However, he adds in the very next paragraph that, “The analysis of the personalistic aspects of the doctrine contained in this document has an existential significance for establishing what true progress is, that is, the development of man. In fact, throughout all modern civilization, especially in Western civilization, there is an occult and at the same time an explicit enough tendency to measure this progress on the basis of ‘things,’ that is, material goods.”

John Paul II appears to be somewhat self-effacing regarding the personalistic enhancements he has contributed in his catechesis here when in the next paragraph he says (pp. 421-422), “The analysis of the personalistic aspects of the Church’s doctrine, contained in Paul VI’s encyclical, emphasizes a determined appeal to measure man’s progress on the basis of the person, that is, of what is good for man as man—what corresponds to his essential dignity. The analysis of the personalistic aspects leads to the conviction that the encyclical presents as a fundamental problem the viewpoint of man’s authentic development. This development is measured to the greatest extent on the basis of ethics and not only on technology.” But he provides more perspective when he adds, “The catechesis dedicated to *Humanae Vitae* constitutes only one part, the final part, of those which dealt with the redemption of the body and the sacramentality of marriage.” However, he immediately explains how this final part circularly reconnects with the beginning of the first part, “If I draw your attention especially to this last catechesis, I do so not only because the subject dealt with is more closely connected to our contemporaneity.” That is, I believe he is referring here to the most pressing issues in our society today such as the value of marriage
and the use of artificial birth control and abortion. He continues, “But I do so above all because of the fact that questions come from it which in a certain sense permeate the sum total of our reflections. It follows that this last part is not artificially added to the sum total but is organically and homogeneously united with it. In a certain sense, that part which in the complex arrangement is located at the end is at the same time found at the beginning of this sum total.”

Out of an evident deep personal interest in our salvation through proper catecheses Pope John Paul II concludes: “…to face the questions raised by Humanae Vitae, especially in theology, to formulate these questions and seek their reply, it is necessary to find that biblical-theological sphere to which we allude when we speak of the redemption of the body and the sacramentality of marriage. In this sphere are found the answers to the perennial questions in the conscience of men and women, and also to the difficult questions of our modern world concerning marriage and procreation.”
PART TWO
A REVIEW OF PREMARITAL PREPARATION LITERATURE AND RESEARCH
CHAPTER THREE
AN HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

In the United States formal premarital *prevention programs* commenced in the 1930s with the first program being developed at the Merrill-Palmer Institute in 1932. The Philadelphia Marriage Council set up a standardized program with the stated purpose of helping both young married and premarital couples gain “a better understanding of what companionship in married life involves and thus help them avoid some of the causes of marital difficulties” (Mudd, Freeman, and Rose, 1941, p.98). Although clergy have had a long history of meeting with couples prior to their weddings, as with the Catholic Church’s longstanding Pre Cana meetings, only in the last four decades has the emphasis of these meetings shifted from teaching the nature and purpose of the marriage ritual to an education focused on preparing couples for the many and diverse challenges of married life (Stahmann & Hiebert, 1997). Likewise, since interactional theories were only beginning to take root in the 1950s and 1960s, professional counselors had a tendency to view marital problems as the problem of one member of the relationship. Consequently, premarital education, as understood today, was not a common part of professional clinical practice (Carroll & Doherty (2003).

There has certainly been an increased interest by both clergy and other family
professionals since the 1970s in preparing couples for marriage through more formal education programs. It is not surprising that this increase reflects a parallel social trend, namely, the greatly increased divorce rate in the United States. Especially in the last two decades, family professionals from a variety of backgrounds have turned their attention to addressing the problems found in contemporary marriages. This development has included a number of prevalent religious, scholarly, and legal initiatives to address the challenges placed on marriages today, therefore including a renewed emphasis on premarital prevention programs (Carroll & Doherty, 2003). In the interest of such prevention the U.S. National Institute of Mental Health commissioned an interdisciplinary study group with a two-pronged goal of prevention science to “provide the knowledge base and intervention strategies to prevent or ameliorate” a wide range of personal and interpersonal disorders (Coie et al., 1993, p. 1013).

More specifically, in the interest of prevention and identification of the particular areas of strength and weakness of given couples that may need to be addressed, this writer turns his attention to commonly used comprehensive premarital assessment questionnaires (PAQs) that have become prominent.
CHAPTER FOUR

A REVIEW AND COMPARISON OF THREE COMMONLY USED COMPREHENSIVE PREMARITAL ASSESSMENT INSTRUMENTS

The prominence of the three instruments we are about to examine is seen to be not only related to the clergy and general public’s frequency of use of these assessment instruments but also in regard to their comprehensiveness and the amount and quality of research that has been done to support their usefulness. They include: the RELATIONship Evaluation (RELATE; Holman, Busby, Doxey, Klein, & Loyer-Carlson, 1997), PREmarital Preparation And Relationship Enhancement (PREPARE; Olson, 1996), and Facilitating Open Couple Communication, Understanding and Study (FOCCUS) (Markey, Micheletto, & Becker, 1997). Larson, Newell, Topham, and Nichols (2002) have already reviewed these three instruments, “…by first describing the theoretical and psychometric criteria on which PAQs should be evaluated; second, describing how well these three PAQs meet these criteria; third, briefly describing and comparing the three PAQs; and fourth, making suggestions for using these PAQs in the premarital assessment process (p. 233).” At the end of this article these writers make recommendations for using PAQs, “To better assist the test administrator in selecting an instrument for use in individual premarital counseling, group premarital counseling, or in the classroom…(p.238).” However, this writer will focus on the values of these instruments as they
relate to their usefulness, more specifically, in Catholic premarital preparation settings.

1. Theoretical and Psychometric Criteria

The three instruments to be considered here have been evaluated based on their ability to meet certain basic theoretical and psychometric criteria pertaining to their usefulness in premarital education and counseling (Larson et al., 1995). The following five criteria (Larson et al., 2002) are viewed as necessary by authorities in the fields of assessment and premarital relationships (Fischer & Corcoran, 1994; Larson et al., 1995; Stahmann & Hiebert, 1997):

1. They are designed primarily or exclusively for assessing premarital relationships, and
2. They collect comprehensive data that are relevant to the premarital counseling or education process.

In a review of 50 years of published longitudinal and cross-sectional research on Premarital factors that are predictive of marital satisfaction and stability, Larson and Holman (1994), based on an ecosystemic theory, concluded that premarital predictors could be organized into three major categories: “First, background and contextual factors, including family-of-origin dynamics, sociocultural factors, such as education and race, and support for the relationship from friends and parents; second, individual traits and behaviors, including self-esteem, interpersonal skills, physical health, and emotional health; and third, couple interactional processes including homogamy (i.e., similarity in race, religion, and socioeconomic status), similarity of values and
attitudes, and couple communication and conflict resolution skills (see Larson & Holman, 1994, for a more detailed list of these factors).

Each of the three PAQ’s content was evaluated based on the above factors to determine the comprehensiveness of each. Each PAQ was also evaluated for inclusion of remarriage items because 49% of all European-American and 40% of all African-American marriages are remarriages for one or both partners (Wilson & Clarke, 1992). Larson et al (2002) adds: “Examples of such items are: ‘I worry that a previous spouse or memories of a previous spouse will cause trouble for our new marriage’ and ‘We agree on what furnishings and possessions each of us will bring to our new home’ (Markey et al., 1997, p.6).” All three questionnaires measure at least 85% or more of these separate premarital factors that predict illness (e.g., depression) or similarity of intelligence, whereas none of the three questionnaires assesses the similarity of absolute status (i.e., the overall similarity of the partners marital satisfaction. Neither FOCCUS nor PREPARE assesses a history of parental mental health based on age, socioeconomic status, intelligence, religion, and race).”

3. Be easy to administer and widely applicable.

The therapist should find the PAQs easy to administer and score, for the client, easy to complete, and should require about a typical therapy hour of 50 minutes to complete (Stahmann & Hiebert, 1997). These three PAQs meet these criteria, except for the completion time—some individuals take 75-90 minutes to complete each PAQ. These instruments are easy to obtain and are inexpensive to purchase. “The most expensive one, PREPARE, costs less than
one-half of an average therapy session. All of them offer computer scoring. Advanced training in test administration is not required for the test administrator (Larson et al, 2002).”

4. *Be easy to interpret.*

For administrators and their couples the resulting scores of these questionnaires should be easy to interpret and use as part of a more comprehensive marriage education process (Stahmann & Hiebert, 1997). “The strength of these three PAQs is in their ease of interpretation. All of them include a comparison or norm group to which the respondents’ scores are compared; or, the criteria for preferred responses to test items is described for the therapist to use in interpretation. Each provides a rich amount of data that can be used in premarital discussions of strengths, weaknesses, and issues (Larson et al, 2002).”

5. *Be reliable and valid.*

“All three PAQs have evidence of internal consistency reliability, content validity, and predictive validity. For PAQs, we were especially interested in their ability to predict later marital satisfaction and stability. Each of these instruments has published evidence to support their predictive validity (Larson et al, 2002).”

2. The RELATIONship Evaluation (RELATE)

*The RELATIONship Evaluation Questionnaire* (RELATE; Holman, Busby, Doxey, Klein, & Loyer-Carlson, 1997) is a 276-item instrument which is intended to guide engaged and dating couples to have meaningful discussions about criteria “proven to affect marital satisfaction
The questions focus on four major areas which are found to influence marital satisfaction, namely: personality/values, family and friend support, communication skills, and upbringing/background. “Identifying trouble spots and common ground using RELATE often helps people determine whether to continue, deepen, or end the relationship (Relate Institute, 2011).” The results of this questionnaire can be sent to a counselor or educator or the couple themselves in the form of a computer printout that is self-interpretive.

“This report is a comprehensive, personalized summary that includes:

- Color bar graphs illustrating how you and your partner rated yourself and each other in eight areas of personality, from sociability to self-esteem
- Comparisons of your attitudes toward roles, sex, children, religion, and more
- Insights on how your childhood experiences, from parental happiness to conflict resolution, have shaped your relationship style
- Identification of problem areas, from power issues to money issues and more
- Identification of your strengths as a couple
- Suggestions for improving your relationship and resources you can use to start productive discussions and move to the next step (Relate Institute, 2011).”

It should be noted that the section that presents information on relationship experiences, including couple communication styles and conflict resolution styles, is based on Gottman’s (1996) research on relationship satisfaction and stability. An assessment on alcohol and other drug use problems is also presented.
RELATE is said to be unique (Larson et al., 2002, p. 237) in that “…it requires no assistance from the counselor in interpreting the results to the couple. This may be attributable to the straightforward and simple presentation on the findings and detailed explanations of the results and guidelines of what to do when differences arise.” However, there is a counselor manual available which provides: some details about the instrument, a brief description of RELATE content areas, information on the administration and scoring of the instrument, and guidelines for using RELATE in counseling and education settings.

In a comparison of strengths of the three premarital instruments presented, RELATE is said to be (Larson et al., 2002, p. 237), “…the easiest instrument to interpret and the easiest to use in large groups and teaching settings. RELATE is also the most comprehensive and the least expensive if using computer scoring.”

3. The PREmarital Preparation and Relationship Enhancement (PREPARE) questionnaire

PREPARE (Olson, 1996, 2004) is a 195-item inventory planned to identify and measure premarital “relationship strengths” and “work areas.” There are 15 relationship categories, four personality scales and an Idealistic Distortion scale which serves as a correction score for idealism, i.e., the tendency for one to answer items in a socially acceptable way, although one is not personally committed to the values expressed. In all there are 20 total scales. PREPARE not only has a standard form but the PREPARE-MC (Marriage with Children) version should be used when one or both of the premarital couple have children. PREPARE is also available in a number of languages including: Spanish, German, Japanese, Chinese, Korean,
and Swedish. The areas of relationship that are assessed by PREPARE include: marital expectations, personality issues, conflict resolution, communication, financial management, leisure activities, sexual relationship, children and parenting, family and friends, role relationship and each individual’s family of origin as related to adaptability and cohesion.

The four personality traits that PREPARE assesses include: assertiveness, self-confidence, avoidance and partner dominance. These personality assessments are engaged to help the counselor in understanding the individual traits that contribute to the couple’s dynamics.

Integrated into the PREPARE computer report is a typology of couples which identifies four basic types of couple interaction: vitalized, harmonious, traditional, and conflicted. Each couple receives a classification into one of these four types. Research indicates that the vitalized couples have the greatest marital satisfaction, whereas conflicted couples are the most likely to become divorced (Fowers, Montel, & Olson, 1996). As a consequence, more intensive counseling intervention is recommended for the conflicted couple.

The computer report which the counselor receives summarizes and analyzes the responses of the couple to the PREPARE items. The Counselor’s Manual provides information for organizing feedback to the couple. The couple will have a workbook for these feedback sessions which contains communication exercises, for example, assertiveness and active listening, which the counselor uses with them to help them discuss their PREPARE results.

4. The Facilitating Open Couple Communication, Understanding and Study (FOCCUS) questionnaire
FOCCUS, which is widely used by both Catholic and Protestant churches as well as nondenominational churches and counseling services, is a 156-item instrument which includes an additional 33 optional items for interfaith couples, cohabiting couples, and couples in which one or both partners are remarrying. It is available in several editions, including: a General Edition with no Christian language or references; a Christian Nondenomination Edition; a Catholic Edition; and an Alternate Edition from the General Edition for couples with limited ability to read or have English as a second language. It too is available in several languages including: Spanish, Vietnamese, Italian, Polish, and Braille. For those who are nonreaders it is available on audiotape. FOCCUS was specifically designed to reflect the values and ideals of marriage as sacred, permanent, faithful, open to children, forgiving, a shared faith in God, and unconditional love (Williams & Jurich, 1995; Larson et al, 2002; Markey & Micheletto, 2000).

FOCCUS is composed of four major content areas which, broken down, contain 19 separate scales in the following groups: personality matches, life styles and friends, communication and problem-solving skills, bonders and integrators, such as religion, values and readiness for marriage, and summary categories, such as key problem indicators and family-of-origin issues.

It is able to be administered to individual couples or groups of couples. The statements for each of the 19 scales are listed in the computer printout of results and the printout shows on which items the couple agree with both each other and the preferred responses. Preferred responses are considered by the authors to be the best or optimum responses that are most
advantageous for the couple. For example, the preferred response to this item is “Disagree”: “There are qualities about my future spouse that I do not respect (Markey et al., 1997, p.63; Markey & Micheletto, 2000).” Also listed in the printout are each partner’s responses and the preferred response when there is a disagreement between them, or when an uncertain response is given to an item. Some items are more important than others and are thus called “key problem indicators” which are also listed for each scale. That is, if an individual answers “disagree” to the item, “I feel my future spouse shows affection adequately or appropriately” that response is interpreted as an indication of future problems (Markey et al., 1997, p. 63). The Patterns for Couple Study is a useful means for examining the couple’s scores. These patterns are determined by observing the couple’s scores on several related items on the test. Such a pattern could include uncertainty, conflict, or fear regarding role expectations. The Counselor Aids found on Individual Items in the Facilitator Notebook help the couple and counselor look more deeply at any statements that may seem to be especially significant, sensitive, or problematic. An example would be, “I am uncomfortable with the amount my future spouse drinks” (Markey et al., 1997, p.2).

The strengths of focus include the availability of several versions for couples that do not speak English or have problems with reading. Conveniently listed on one scale are the key problem areas that are more highly weighted as to their importance as items. Furthermore, the especially important individual items are provided with patterns for couple study and counselor aids which are very helpful in interpreting the results. Additional groups of items are supplied for
couples who plan for remarriage, and/or have cohabitated, and/or are planning an interfaith marriage. There are also some supplemental materials available.

5. Making a choice among instruments

One concern of the authors (Larson et al., 2002) is that FOCCUS does not measure three factors that predict marital quality, namely: parental mental illness, similarity of intelligence, and similarity of absolute status. Another concern is that objective evidence for the validity of preferred responses is missing. This writer responds to this last concern that the preferred responses have been proven in validity through many other sources including philosophical, theological and other scientific research. That is why this instrument, through the preferences expressed, best reflects the value clarifications that have been recognized by the Catholic Church for centuries since the time of Christ up through the leadership of Pope John Paul II and our present Pope Francis. It becomes evident upon review that the other two PAQs considered here, RELATE and PREPARE do not commit to the preference of as many values as does the FOCCUS instrument.

Finally, in their “Recommendations for using PAQs,” Larson et al., (2002, p. 238) tell us that among the three outstanding PAQs reviewed by them, “For more intense premarital counseling when the therapist has 3 or more sessions to work with the couple, use PREPARE or FOCCUS.” They also wisely state that, “PAQs should not be used for prediction purposes;
however, the therapist has an ethical responsibility to adequately counsel couples who are a poor marriage risk (i.e., have ‘low marital aptitude’).”
CHAPTER FIVE

FOCCUS, THE QUESTIONNAIRE OF CHOICE FOR CATHOLIC PREMARITAL
PREPARATION PROGRAMS

1. Predictive Validity

Although such instruments as FOCCUS should not be used for the purpose of predicting the success of individual couples to the couples themselves, it is, nevertheless, good for us to know the relative predictive validity of the instrument we are using so as to have confidence in the value of the instrument. Hence we can inform and counsel couples regarding the outcomes of their using such an instrument so as to assess their strengths in a supportive manner and their weaknesses in a motivational, educative, and personalistic manner as exemplified by Pope John Paul II.

As of 1995 PREPARE was the only premarital inventory to report any follow-up research assessing the predictive validity of the instrument. There had been two studies (Fowers & Olson, 1986; Larsen & Olson, 1989) which demonstrated the predictive validity of PREPARE with couples married 2 to 3 years. However, FOCCUS which had replaced the Pre-Marital Inventory (PMI) became the predominant premarital inventory used in marriage preparation by the Roman Catholic Church, being used by approximately two thirds of the Roman Catholic dioceses in the country at the time. It was also being used by over 500 Protestant churches of different denominations at that time. But since PREPARE was the only such inventory with follow-up
studies, Lee Williams and Joan Jurich (1995), decided to evaluate the predictive validity of FOCCUS. FOCCUS was recognized by the above authors as “unique because some of the questions reflect the values and ideals of a sacramental marriage as defined by the Roman Catholic Church (e.g., permanency, fidelity, openness to children, forgiveness, the role of shared faith and values, unconditional loving).” We find their explanation for such a predictive validity study to be as follows:

Assessing the predictive validity of FOCCUS is important because the instrument is widely used for marriage preparation. The FOCCUS computer service currently scores approximately 30,000 forms a year. However, this represents only a portion of the total FOCCUS inventories administered each year since many are self-scored by hand or through computer packages. Demonstrating the predictive validity of FOCCUS would help confirm that the instrument’s questions and topics are important areas to address in marriage preparation. Furthermore, with strong predictive validity, greater confidence could be placed in the instrument’s ability to help identify couples who are at risk for developing distressed marriages. If a couple were confirmed to be at risk after further evaluation, then they could be encouraged to extend their engagement, reevaluate their decision to marry, or seek additional preparation through structured programs or premarital counseling (Fowers & Olson, 1986).

In describing their methodology, they tell us that the goal of this study is to target couples who had been married 4 to 5 years and had taken the FOCCUS instrument before their marriage, since it was known at that time that the number of divorces peaks after 2 years of marriage.
(National Center for Health Statistics, 1990), couples who had been married 4 to 5 years should be past this critical period.

It is also important to note (Williams & Jurich, 1995, p. 144) that the very taking of FOCCUS could have reduced the number of divorced or separated couples by helping some couples to identify and remedy problem areas before they escalated and others might have decided to end their engagement because of what they learned from taking FOCCUS. It was documented by The Family Life Office in the Archdiocese of Omaha that about 3-7% of couples postponed or decided not to marry when premarital inventories were not included in their marriage preparation; whereas, about 17% of couples decided not to marry or postponed their marriage when premarital inventories were introduced into their preparation programs.

It is uncertain (p. 146) whether FOCCUS would have predictive validity if taken by non-Catholic couples: “Although some of the religious questions were designed with Roman Catholic beliefs in mind, the large majority of the instrument explores areas that pertain to all couples preparing for marriage. It is also important to note that a significant number of non-Catholics (n=95, or 23%) are included in the study due to the large number of interfaith marriages in the sample. This suggests that the predictive validity of FOCCUS might hold for non-Catholic couples, but this would need to be confirmed with additional research.”

2. The Dyadic Adjustment Scale

For measuring marital quality these analysts used The Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS) by Spanier (1976) which is known to have good validity and reliability. An important advantage
of the DAS are the studies available (Crane, Allgood, Larson, & Griffin, 1990; Spanier, 1976) that state the DAS norms for both couples who are distressed and those nondistressed, thus allowing one to find a cut-off score using the norms rather than an arbitrary convention like a median split (Williams & Jurich, 1995, p. 146).

In order to assess the predictive validity of FOCCUS, with marital quality as the dependent variable and percent couple agreement scores for each FOCCUS topic as the predictor variables, discriminant function analyses were applied (Williams & Jurich, 1995, p. 146), “Percent couple agreement scores represent the percentage of questions within a topic area on which both partners agreed with the preferred response. (Response categories for FOCCUS are agree, disagree, or uncertain.) Except where noted, the percent couple agreement scores were entered simultaneously as predictor variables into the discriminant function analyses.”

Although there is a much greater amount of detail supplied by the authors (Williams & Jurich, 1995) which demonstrates their carefulness in both the areas of methodology and results, this writer will now proceed more directly to quote some of the more important final conclusions contained in the “discussion” section of their research (pp. 151-152):

The key goal of the research was to assess the predictive validity of FOCCUS. Specifically, would FOCCUS scores during engagement predict a couple’s future marital success 4 to 5 years later? FOCCUS scores were able to predict successfully in 67.6% to 73.9% of the cases (depending upon the scoring method used) the couples with high quality marriages versus those with poor quality marriages. It was also demonstrated that
FOCCUS scores could be used to identify 75% of the couples who later developed distressed marriages.

3. Conclusion in Favor of Predictive Validity

The classification rates support the conclusion that FOCCUS does have good predictive validity. Additionally, couples with high quality marriages had higher subscale scores than couples with poor quality marriages in all topic areas. These differences were statistically significant in 12 out of the 13 subscales, providing additional empirical support for the predictive validity of FOCCUS.

Although FOCCUS does have good predictive validity, it is not error free in its predictions. Even using the less conservative scoring method, slightly over a quarter of the couples were [sic] inaccurately classified. The modest classification rate is not totally unexpected since correlations between predictor and criterion variables are generally modest due to the complexity of human nature (Nunnally, 1978, p. 90). For example, several postmarital [sic] factors (e.g., stressful life events, receiving therapy) could significantly alter later marital outcomes. In fact, given the complexity of human nature, relationships, and life, it is perhaps surprising that any instrument could do better than chance in predicting marital success 4 to 5 years later.

However, the fact that FOCCUS is not error free in its predictions is an important reminder that the FOCCUS instrument should not be used as a single, infallible predictor of future marital success. Although FOCCUS can be used to help identify couples who
may be at risk for developing marital distress, both the couple and the counselor need to understand that FOCCUS results are not infallible and should not be viewed as a “pass-fail” test. The FOCCUS results should be one of several pieces of information the couple and the counselor weigh in assessing the potential of the future marital relationship.

4. A Comparison with PREPARE

As for a comparison between FOCCUS and PREPARE, this research (Williams & Jurich, 1995, p. 152) tells us that they are, “…similar in terms of their predictive validity. This is not a surprising result since there are some similarities between the two instruments in terms of the topics or issues they address.” Since there are several methodological differences between FOCCUS and PREPARE, it is difficult to make a more definitive statement as to which instrument has better predictive validity. “PREPARE and FOCCUS will need to be tested in a single study to make such a statement. However, there may be limited value in such a study since the predictive validity of both instruments has already been demonstrated.”

5. Internal Analyses of FOCCUS

Adding to the value of this instrument it should be noted (FOCCUS, Inc., 2012) that the Gallup Organization, in 1996, studied the internal consistency of the newly added Cohabiting Couples subscale, following the same methodology used in the 1985 analysis of FOCCUS. Some items were retained or deleted based on item descriptive statistics, item subscale correlation and KR-20 Reliability. The report rendered a .79 reliability coefficient for the final Cohabiting Couples subscale (The Gallup Organization, 1996). And in 2000 there were three scales, namely,
Religion and Values, Marriage Covenant and Interfaith Marriages which were revised with the intention of strengthening the value of these items “based on national research done in the previous five years. The Gallup Organization conducted an internal analysis of these scales. Construct Validity was established. KR-20 reliability was .88 for males and .83 for females.”

And most recently reported (FOCCUS, Inc., 2012):

In 2009, FOCCUS, Inc. USA conducted a factor analysis of all items on the FOCCUS Pre-Marriage Inventory. Initial factoring used a random sample of 2,000 couples who had completed the inventory between 1996 and 2005 and were cross validated using a second, equally large random sample. Among others, the following factors were identified as particularly salient constructs measured by the FOCCUS Pre-Marriage Inventory and are factors identified by other research as being important to marital satisfaction: Respect and support for partner, Concern about (negative) habits, Disagreement on spiritual practices, Reservations about the marriage, Unresolved relationship conflict, Financial issues and roles/responsibilities, Belief that spirituality and values are integral to the relationship, Conflict Avoidance, and Acceptance by extended family.

As its value is upheld and retained we might see even more clearly why the FOCCUS instrument could remain the questionnaire of choice for Catholic premarital preparation programs.
1. Engaged Couples Referred by Their Pastors

   It was over a span of twelve years and from various resources that this writer was able to
gather the ten volunteer couples needed to accomplish this piece of research.

   Couple #1 came from St. Philip the Apostle Church in Camp Springs, MD, and we met
for three sessions from January 5, 2000 to January 19, 2000.

   Each session was about 1½ hours for all couples.

   Couple #2 came from the Shrine of the Most Blessed Sacrament parish, Washington,
D.C., and we met for a few sessions from February 5, 2002 to May 21, 2002.

   Couple #3 came from Newman House, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, MD, and
we met for four sessions from March 10, 2003 to about April 30, 2003.

   Couple #4 came from St. Mary’s Church, Annapolis, MD and we met for three sessions
from August 2, 2008 to September 10, 2008.

   Couple #5 came from St. Mary’s Church, Annapolis, MD and we met for three sessions
from August 5, 2008 to September 6, 2008.

   Couple #6 came from St. Mary’s Church, Annapolis, MD and we met for three sessions
from September 26, 2009 to November 7, 2009.

Couple #7 came from St. Andrew by the Bay Church, Annapolis, MD and we met for three sessions from March 18, 2010 to May 27, 2010.

Couple #8 came from St. Andrew by the Bay Church, Annapolis, MD and we met for three sessions from January 22, 2011 to March 6, 2011.

Couple #9 came from St. Andrew by the Bay Church, Annapolis, MD and we met for four sessions from August 21, 2011 to September 4, 2011.

Couple #10 came from St. Mary’s Church, Annapolis, MD and we met for four sessions from June 30, 2012 to July 17, 2012.

2. Introductory Letter, Confidentiality and Signing up

Each couple had been given an Introductory Letter (see Appendix I) which would help them to understand the voluntary contribution they will be making to this study and the fact that they, as a couple, would gain greater awareness and clarity regarding the nature of their relationships through the discussions that will follow. They would also be assured that all data presented in the research study would be represented by numbers and letters to preserve their anonymity and assure confidentiality. They would then each sign his and her agreement (Appendix II) to voluntarily participate in this research study.

3. Implementation of the Initial Inventory

Next, each member of each couple was administered the *FOCCUS 2000 Inventory*. Each
was handed a copy of the Catholic Edition, of the Couple Inventory along with an answer sheet for each. They were then instructed to follow the directions on the back of the Couple Inventory which reads:

Please complete the biographical data side of your answer sheet. Follow instructions on the sheet carefully.

When you have answered the biographical questions, turn the sheet over and begin to respond to the **FOCCUS statements**. Please read each statement and mark the response that most appropriately reflects what you think and feel.

Completely darken with a No. 2 pencil the appropriate circle next to the number of the statement on the answer sheet. Do not make pencil marks outside the circle or elsewhere on the answer sheet. Erase incorrect answers completely if you change your responses.

For each statement they had to respond to they would fill in a circle under Agree, or Disagree, or Uncertain. All couples were expected to respond to **FOCCUS** statements 1-156. If they were an interfaith couple, they were also expected to respond to statements 165-173. If they were a cohabiting couple, they had to respond also to statements 174-189.

They were asked not to discuss the statements with their partners while answering **FOCCUS**. The instruction also stated that: “When you have completed your responses and returned your answer sheet, you are encouraged to discuss the statements with your partner even before you go over **FOCCUS** with the persons who are helping to prepare you for marriage.”
4. Post Inventory: FOCCUS Summary Sheet

In the hand-scoring of each couple’s responses, partner by partner, a Summary Sheet is used to record whether the responses were in Agreement or Disagreement with the Preferred Response and also whether there were responses that were marked Uncertain. This Summary Sheet then serves as a guide for the facilitator to use when he gets back with each couple to discuss, in subsequent session(s), the results of their responses to the FOCCUS inventory in keeping with the ultimate purpose of the inventory which is Facilitating Open Couple Communication, Understanding & Study.

5. Graph of Agreement

For a visual and more comprehensive understanding of how each couple has responded, there is a Graph of Agreement (see Appendix III), broken down in “Percent of Couple AGREEMENT with Each Other and with Preferred Response;” and this writer should explain here that Uncertain responses are deducted also from the percent of agreement in that they also require discussion to help each to diminish or eradicate the uncertainty.

Percentages are rendered for 16 categories (A-P) which include: Life Style Expectations, Friends/Interests, Personality Match, Personal Issues, Communication, Problem Solving, Religion & Values, Parenting Issues, Extended Family, Sexuality Issues, Financial Issues, Readiness Issues, Marriage Covenant, Interfaith Marriage, Second Marriage, and Cohabiting Couples. An additional category, also expressed in a percentage, is summed up as Key Problem Indicators for the first thirteen of the sixteen categories previously mentioned. In other words,
certain items within those categories are weighted more heavily by way of research as more important areas than are the others and therefore they are given this separate but prominent emphasis. It should be noted here, as the authors state in the manual (p.4): Percentage of agreement scores 75% and above generally represent areas of strength within a relationship, while percentages of agreement scores below 40% generally represent areas that deserve special attention within a relationship.”

Furthermore, as pointed out in the manual, observing the biographical summary: “…is an excellent starting point for the facilitator to begin generating hypothesis [sic] about areas that the couple may need to discuss and examine closely. For example, couples with significant differences in age or educational backgrounds may have very different expectations in terms of marital roles, occupational expectations, or friends and interests (p. 4).”

6. The Item by Item Facilitation of Discussion

In accord with the original intent of the authors of FOCCUS: Facilitating Open Couple Communication, Understanding & Study, an item by item facilitation of discussion with each couple is key to the learning and understanding a couple will have between each other.

As the authors state in the Facilitator Notebook (pp. 7-8): “It is helpful to have couples look over their areas of strength, that is, example of questions on which they both agreed with the preferred response. However, most of the discussion time is probably best devoted to having the couple talk about items where they were uncertain or disagreed with the preferred response or with each other.”
As the authors make clear (pp. 8-9), this role of facilitator is not one of being “a passive bystander in the process,” but rather taking on a role of helping the partners “listen to each other, share thoughts and feelings and, if necessary, work for solutions or compromises.” In addition to this role of facilitation, the facilitator, at times must assume a second role, that of a teacher. And since the authors use a most important conflict/communication management example of, “if there has been physical violence in the relationship,” this writer will explicate here in brief detail how he teaches in such a specific example or regarding other issues related to the escalation of emotions between a couple. First, it should be taught that either individual of a couple has the right to call a “timeout” in the conflict. This serves the purpose of giving each more time to think rather than emote regarding a given area of conflict so as to return in a reasonable amount of time to further discuss the matter. And, secondly, a “speaker/listener” mode of discussion should be taught in which each individual gets to speak his/her mind on the matter and the listener has to paraphrase back to the speaker what he/she believes the other is saying until, to the speaker’s satisfaction, the listener understands him/her according to the speaker’s intent. There are more details that can and should be added to these two most important areas of conflict management and communication style; and this writer provides a two-page handout to the couple that also incorporates Bible references that support these basic teachings.

But as with any teaching mode the authors rightly caution against entering this mode of teaching too soon. It is better to do so “very consciously and only after helping the couple discuss an issue thoroughly and look for their own solutions. If teaching happens too early, the couple will often agree easily with the facilitator’s instructions and then see it as a quick
solution.” And, if the solution is too quickly given, and not uniquely struggled for by the couple, they may fail to perceive its relative importance to their future and each one’s need to work on such behaviors and the new skills learned. Given the importance of such skills, the facilitator could next ask the couple if there is an area of disagreement they have been struggling with and then, with their permission, facilitate their resolution of the matter through the new skills provided, thus confirming the value of these skills in a very poignant manner. These classical teaching skills, historically dating back to the Greek philosophers, more specifically, Socrates (c. 470-399 B.C.), and therefore called Socratic Method, are exemplified in how Christ taught. He asked the right questions and, with parables, further drew from His disciples’ experiences their abilities to understand and internalize the values being taught in this manner. As mentioned earlier in this writing, therapeutically, this model is being used in the counseling field today successfully with some very difficult behavioral disorders; again, it is called, *Motivational Interviewing* (Rolnick & Miller, 1995).

Another important use of the *FOCCUS* items is for reality-testing for extended growth (p.9); for example, an item may start with the words, “We are in agreement about how we will…”

The authors also tell us not to become too involved in defending them regarding a preferred response if there is disagreement by an individual or the couple regarding a given item, but rather the facilitator should explore the rationale behind the individual’s or couple’s response to discover the possible implications for the relationship.
Facilitators are also encouraged to give each couple their “graph of agreement” encouraging them to comment on (p.9) “the strengths and challenges they see.” The facilitator may then give input “around Match, Skills, Bonders or a specific category.”

7. A Second Taking of the FOCCUS Inventory

The hypothesis of this research is to demonstrate a significant difference between the scores of the 10 couples’ pre-test and the scores of their post-test. These couples have taken the initial FOCCUS inventory and received follow-up sessions focused around their responses to items which they marked as “uncertain” or “disagree” with the “preferred” response and/or each other. With a second taking of the FOCCUS Inventory it is expected that the intervening variable of the sessions will effect an improved level of responses upon the second taking of the FOCCUS inventory—responses that would be significantly higher from how they would perform on the second taking if left to their own initiatives to further explore the important issues that the FOCCUS inventory covers.
1. The $t$-Test

The $t$-test which is considered to be one of the most useful statistical methods for determining the differences in performance between at least two groups of subjects under different conditions has been used. In this case two mean scores have been obtained, one from the 10 couples’ pre-test scores and one from their post-test scores. It is expected that in using the $t$-test the result would render a significant difference between the two mean scores which would indicate the importance of having the formal sessions with the facilitator. However, it should be noted that this design provides minimal internal validity, controlling only for the selection of subjects and experimental mortality wherein the loss of subjects from a comparison control group could greatly affect the comparisons because of the unique characteristics of those subjects. Although having a control group would provide external validity, i.e., having an additional 10 couples who took the pre-test and, left on their own, but encouraged to discuss items on the FOCCUS Inventory, would return to take the post-test about 6 weeks later—an approximate estimate of the average time couples would take in the experimental condition discussing the items in which they were Uncertain, disagreed with the Preferred response and/or with each other in the presence of their facilitator. However, given the limits of time for this writer, finding 10 more volunteer couples for this research proved to be prohibitive. From a common sense perspective having such a control group might be seen as less valuable when we consider how most couples who have not been placed in the task of considering the values presented in the FOCCUS Inventory and yet have made the “engaged” commitment will be less likely to explore such values at this point on their own. A common sense analogy, from a learning perspective, might be that, if you want to see if attendance at an archery club improved
participants’ accuracy in hitting the target, then it hardly needs to be checked whether pupils who
do no archery get better at it naturally. It is theoretically possible that it might happen, but how
much time should be spent on it given that scenario?

It is also good to note that this approach eliminates the problem of not having matched
groups when you have both a group that receives the experimental condition and another group
that does not. Here the approach is to deal only with the differences in performances by the same
subjects under the two conditions.

To sum up the research question being asked: Is there a significant difference between
the pretest score values for couples taking the FOCCUS Inventory and the posttest values when
taking the inventory again after Facilitated Open Couple Communication, Understanding and
Study have been accomplished with regard especially for those items where the couples were
“Uncertain,” or “Disagree” with the “preferred response” and/or with each other?

The Null Hypothesis which we hope to disprove would state: There is no significant
difference between the pretest and the posttest scores after applying the FOCCUS facilitation

2. Computational Formula for $t$-testing dependent samples

\[
t = \frac{\sum D}{\sqrt{n \sum D^2 - (\sum D)^2}}
\]

\[
\sqrt{\frac{n - 1}{n - 1}}
\]
The top part of this equation is the difference between the two means divided by the number of subjects (couples). We subtract the average of the first (pretest) scores from the average of the second (posttest) scores to arrive at a sum (\( \sum \)) of the differences (\( D \))--the average difference between the two sets of scores.

The bottom part of this equation is the Standard Deviation (Sd) which is a measure of the variability of dispersion of the scores divided by the number of subjects minus 1 (\( n-1 \)) and then square-rooted.
CHAPTER EIGHT

RESULTS

Table 1. Scores on FOCCUS Inventories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COUPLE</th>
<th>PRE-SCORE</th>
<th>POST-SCORE</th>
<th>DIFFERENCE SCORE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>89.06</td>
<td>93.56</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>80.06</td>
<td>96.06</td>
<td>16</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>75.33</td>
<td>91.66</td>
<td>16.33</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>77.40</td>
<td>89.53</td>
<td>12.13</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>78.8</td>
<td>92.33</td>
<td>13.53</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>66.21</td>
<td>86.21</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>97.86</td>
<td>17.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>67.93</td>
<td>86.93</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>79.86</td>
<td>22.86</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[ N = 10 \text{ (couples)} \]

\[ \sum D = 150.21 \]

\[ d = \frac{\sum D}{N} = \frac{150.21}{10} = 15.02 \]

\[ \sum D^2 = 2,539.68 \]

63
\[ D^2 = 25,396.8 \]

\[ t = \frac{\sum D}{\sqrt{\frac{n \sum D^2 - (\sum D)^2}{n-1}}} \]

\[ t = \frac{150.21}{\sqrt{25,396.8 - 22,563.04}} \]

\[ t = \frac{150.21}{17.74} \]

\[ t = 8.47 \]

We may now proceed to the \( t \) distribution critical values table to determine whether this \( t \) score of 8.47 is significant to a probable degree that helps us to eliminate the null hypothesis and conclude that following the FOCCUS manual’s strong recommendation that a facilitator follow up with each couple’s areas of disagreement or uncertainty will definitely improve their knowledge and awareness of both the Catholic Church’s teachings and their own awareness of each other’s values and convictions.

Since the degrees of freedom (df) = N-1, in this case we have 10 couples minus 1 = 9.
Table 2. $t$ Distribution Critical Values Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>df</th>
<th>$t_{.50}$</th>
<th>$t_{.75}$</th>
<th>$t_{.80}$</th>
<th>$t_{.85}$</th>
<th>$t_{.90}$</th>
<th>$t_{.95}$</th>
<th>$t_{.975}$</th>
<th>$t_{.99}$</th>
<th>$t_{.995}$</th>
<th>$t_{.999}$</th>
<th>$t_{.9995}$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>1.376</td>
<td>1.963</td>
<td>3.078</td>
<td>6.314</td>
<td>12.71</td>
<td>31.82</td>
<td>63.66</td>
<td>122.11</td>
<td>318.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.816</td>
<td>1.061</td>
<td>1.386</td>
<td>1.886</td>
<td>2.920</td>
<td>4.303</td>
<td>6.965</td>
<td>9.250</td>
<td>12.924</td>
<td>15.837</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.765</td>
<td>0.978</td>
<td>1.250</td>
<td>1.638</td>
<td>2.353</td>
<td>3.182</td>
<td>4.541</td>
<td>5.841</td>
<td>8.610</td>
<td>12.924</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.741</td>
<td>0.941</td>
<td>1.190</td>
<td>1.533</td>
<td>2.132</td>
<td>2.776</td>
<td>3.747</td>
<td>4.604</td>
<td>6.869</td>
<td>10.215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.727</td>
<td>0.920</td>
<td>1.156</td>
<td>1.476</td>
<td>2.015</td>
<td>2.571</td>
<td>3.365</td>
<td>4.032</td>
<td>5.893</td>
<td>8.610</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.718</td>
<td>0.906</td>
<td>1.134</td>
<td>1.440</td>
<td>1.943</td>
<td>2.447</td>
<td>3.143</td>
<td>3.707</td>
<td>4.781</td>
<td>6.869</td>
</tr>
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<td>7</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.711</td>
<td>0.896</td>
<td>1.119</td>
<td>1.415</td>
<td>1.895</td>
<td>2.365</td>
<td>2.998</td>
<td>3.499</td>
<td>4.781</td>
<td>5.893</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.706</td>
<td>0.889</td>
<td>1.108</td>
<td>1.397</td>
<td>1.860</td>
<td>2.306</td>
<td>2.896</td>
<td>3.355</td>
<td>4.501</td>
<td>5.041</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.703</td>
<td>0.883</td>
<td>1.100</td>
<td>1.383</td>
<td>1.833</td>
<td>2.262</td>
<td>2.821</td>
<td>3.250</td>
<td>4.297</td>
<td>4.781</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.700</td>
<td>0.879</td>
<td>1.093</td>
<td>1.372</td>
<td>1.812</td>
<td>2.228</td>
<td>2.764</td>
<td>3.169</td>
<td>4.144</td>
<td>4.58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Looking at the table above (Gerstman, B.B., 2007) we can see that, proceeding from the left at 9 (the degrees of freedom), we can move to the right all the way to the end of this line where the acceptable score for significance is 4.781 or greater and our score of 8.47 is significantly greater; and by going to the top of this column we can see that for a one-tail test, such as this, the probability (p-value) of the null hypothesis being true-- $p = <0.0005$, wherein the p-value is the smallest level of significance for which the observed sample statistic tells us to reject the null hypothesis. We can, therefore, reject the null hypothesis that the facilitation process for the FOCCUS Instrument made no difference in the learning of these premarital couples regarding each other’s values and the preferred values of the Catholic Church. More positively stated, we can say with a very high degree of probable certitude that the facilitation sessions were successful in gaining positive changes, and that the $t$-score is not likely due to chance or sampling error in the development of each couple’s understanding of each other and the preferred values taught by the Catholic Church.
CHAPTER NINE
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Although the FOCCUS Inventory on the whole appears to not have any major problems there is one item that proved to be problematic with a few couples that took the inventory, namely, item #7 which states, “There are certain behaviors or habits in my future spouse which sometimes annoy me.” As this facilitator focused on the meaning of this item with those couples he himself saw why the preferred response of “disagree” would be problematic, especially in an age when people are giving up so easily on even considering to get married. Unless there is a core value of faith and morals involved should we not tend as Christians to overlook petty annoyances? It seems obvious that Christ wants us to be less judgmental when he says (Mt. 7:1-3, NAB): “If you want to avoid judgment stop passing judgment. Your verdict on others will be the verdict passed on you. The measure with which you measure will be used to measure you. Why look at the speck in your brother’s eye when you miss the plank in your own.” And St. Paul says (1 Cor. 13:7 NAB), “There is no limit to love’s forbearance.” However, St. Paul (2 Cor. 6:14, NAB) does caution us: “Do not yoke yourselves in a mismatch with unbelievers. After all what do righteousness and lawlessness have in common, or what fellowship can light have with darkness.” In general, it would seem more normal for the Christian to even expect to be annoyed by some of another’s peculiar “behaviors or habits,” especially when it is someone close to them, such as a spouse.
Some couples also felt that they had misinterpreted an item because of the double negative manner in which it was presented and therefore responded opposite to the preferred response. One such item is #61, “My future spouse and I agree that it is not healthy for us to avoid all disagreements.” It might have read, more positively and with less chance of ambiguity, “My future spouse and I agree that it is healthier for us to discuss most of our disagreements,” or “…all of our serious disagreements.” However, these were the only complaints some couples made against the inventory that appeared to have some validity.

Nevertheless, the greatest concern this researcher, facilitator, teacher and counselor has with regard to the reliability and validity of such an instrument as the FOCCUS Inventory is the social desirability bias. This bias can be defined as the systematic error in self-report measures that results from the desire of the respondents to project a favorable image to the researcher. In other words, the respondents may choose to tell you what they believe you want to hear instead of what they actually believe. Perhaps FOCCUS shows an attempt to offset this bias in the instruction for the response sheet where it says: “It is not a test or a way to predict the future. It is designed to help you target the topics you need and want to talk about as a couple.” And the instruction says, further on, that, “Please read each statement and mark the response that most appropriately reflects what you think and feel.”

This facilitator adds, “Be as honest as possible in your responses,” in his personal effort to offset this social desirability bias. The best researcher, where values are concerned, should want to know where the subjects of research are truly coming from—what they have already internalized value-wise, so perhaps as a facilitator, teacher and counselor he can facilitate their further progress. But being “value-free” in setting up inventory items is virtually the same as setting up a
bias in another direction by indirectly saying “values do not matter.” Neither should we try to remove social desirability by indirect questioning by referring to what others might think about a given set of values. For the cure would be worse than the disease (Fisher, R. J., & Tellis, G. J. 1998). As Christians today in this culture we should not be guided by such a type of “poll morality.” Nevertheless, it is satisfying that the $t$-score is large enough that it might have offset to some degree such social desirability bias that may have occurred in the pretest; and it is also an advantage, this writer believes, to develop a habit of using what this researcher uses in the counseling methodology of Motivational Interviewing (Prochaska, J. O., & DiClemente, C. C. 1982; Rolnick, S., & Miller, W. R. 1995) ahead of the posttest by getting to the “Why” the couples were deciding on this new view of a given value so as to help assure their internalizing that value rather than saying so because it is “socially desirable” to do so as a Catholic Christian or to please this facilitator.

As for the design and methodology for determining the value of this piece of research, this facilitator feels validated in his use of the FOCCUS Inventory in a pretest-posttest design with one group, even though some would argue strongly for having two groups to compare, one group being the experimental group and the other being a control group that does not get the intervention (facilitation) before the posttest is administered. Using the same subjects in both groups has some special values of its own. For at least one group of statisticians (Spence, J.T. et al. 1968, p. 140) could be said to even prefer this method and design when they state: “Whenever possible, it is advantageous to use the same subjects in both conditions. In the first place, the actual mechanics of getting the subjects and running them in the experiment are usually simpler because only a single random sample is used. More importantly, there is no problem of obtaining
comparable groups. The subjects serving in the different conditions are ideally matched; they are highly correlated because they are the same people.” In other words, there is no better comparable match for a couple being evaluated than that couple itself.

Perhaps the greatest weaknesses of this research study have to do with sample size and random sampling. It may certainly be seen as a stretch to say that a sample of 10 couples coming from the Annapolis city and Prince Georges County areas of Maryland, who volunteered (were not “randomly selected”) to become part of this small research project, can truly be considered to be representative of a larger world population. Nevertheless, this sample of couples demonstrated a notable and consistent positive learning curve from the time of taking the pretest to the time of taking the posttest with the facilitation process of the FOCCUS manual intervening. As a type of pilot project it is encouraging to this writer and he hopes that the Catholic Church’s clergy and lay leadership continue such research, on a much broader scale, for the sake of improvement of such elements as this FOCCUS Inventory and its facilitation follow-up as a means of marriage preparation.

It is recorded in Pope John Paul II’s biography (Weigel, G. 1999, pp. 97-98) that in 1950 under a communist polish regime that had become “unprecedented” in its threat to Christian family life, the then Father Wojtyla “launched at St. Florian’s the first marriage-preparation program in the history of the Archdiocese of Krakow. In those days, a Catholic couple’s only encounter with a priest prior to their wedding might have been to complete the appropriate legal forms and discuss the ceremony itself.” One of this writer’s sisters tells him that some years ago her experience of marriage preparation was very similar here in the U.S. of A. Fortunately more detailed marriage preparation programs are being mandated in the Catholic Churches here. Pope
John Paul II’s biographer goes on to tell us that “Wojtyła set out to create a pastoral program that systematically [emphasis added] prepared young couples for Christian marriage and family life through religious reflection, theological education, and a frank exploration of the practical and personal difficulties and opportunities of married life and child rearing.” And he “…didn’t shy away from certain topics as unbefitting a priest’s attention.” He started talking about a personalist theology of the body and soul even back then saying (Boniecki, A. 1979, “1954”):

The sexual drive is a gift from God. Man may offer this drive to God through a vow of virginity. He may offer it to another human being with the knowledge that he is offering it to a person. It cannot be an act of chance. On the other side there is also a human being who must not be hurt, whom one must love. Only a person can love a person. To love means wishing the other’s welfare, to offer oneself for the good of the other. When, as a result of giving oneself for the good of another, a new life comes into being, this must be a giving arising out of love. In this area one must not separate love from desire. If we respect desire within love, we will not violate love…

May many more of us have the courage to carry forward Pope John Paul II’s legacy especially for the ministry of marriage preparation.
Dear Couple,

With the approval of your pastor you may now be a part of a research project that is expected to give you a comprehensive overview of all of the major areas of marital relationship that have been researched to be predictive of success in marriage; and furthermore, your participation may contribute to the further development of such programs nationwide, and, perhaps, worldwide.

Hi, I am Dr. Hank Sweeney, a Candidate for the Doctor of Ministry program (Pastoral Care and Counseling) at The Catholic University of America’s Religious Studies and Theology Department. Having completed my course of studies for this degree, I am now focusing on my Project (commonly known as a “dissertation” in academic, non-professional degrees). Well before accomplishing a Ph.D. in Psychology (Clinical/Counseling), already in the counseling field, I became very aware of the need for better marriage preparation—through personal experiences, through the couples I worked with, and through the national statistics concerning our divorce rate in the United States, now at about 50%. Through my inquiries and research into the various programs being offered to Christians of various denominations and in various Catholic dioceses throughout the United States I believe I have selected a program that deserves to be further researched so as to demonstrate its effectiveness for imitation by more parishes and dioceses. Of course, in my efforts to achieve this goal, I will also be accomplishing a project necessary to complete my degree. I would certainly appreciate your support in accomplishing both of these goals.

This research will only require four to six hours of your time depending on your needs, and not counting your time for taking the inventories (approximately 2 hours). We can negotiate for more time together if there appears to be a need for it. After your program of premarital preparation and follow-up is over, a session will be given to each of you explaining the purpose and results of this research as they apply to you. In this research only I will know what names go with what individual results, and I am bound by laws of strict confidentiality not to provide any but a fictitious name when reporting the data that pertains to each of you. However, as can be expected and agreed upon I will inform your pastor of your participation, and inform him of the results on the FOCCUS instrument which will be used for this marriage preparation through a “Confidential Observation Form.”

What you will have graciously donated to this research effort will be among the most private and sacred places in your lives, if you choose to participate. Therefore, whatever good comes out of this research, your contributions will have to be recognized as the most important.

Thank you for your consideration of being a part of this endeavor. And please sign the accompanying form if you choose to be a part of this research in premarital preparation.

Sincerely,

Henry K. Sweeney, Jr., Ph.D., LCPC, D.Min. (Candidate)
Henry K. Sweeney, Jr., Ph.D., (D.Min., Candidate)
2521 North 18th Street
Arlington, Virginia 22201-4046

Dear Dr. Sweeney,

Yes, please include us in your research project as spoken about in the accompanying letter. We understand that the personal information obtained through our participation will be confidential. We also understand that we will receive further detailed information regarding the results of the research and how it relates to us.

Sincerely,

X ___________________________ __________________________
Signature Date

Your printed name

Address

Phone Number(s)

X ___________________________ __________________________
Signature Date

Your printed name

Address
BIBLIOGRAPHY


