

The Pill, the Pope, the Problem

By
Father Walter Austin

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"When the disciples got near him, they asked him, 'Why do you speak in parables?' He answered: 'To you has been given the knowledge of the mysteries of the reign of God, but it has not been given to the others. To the man who has, more will be given until he grows rich; the man who has not, will lose what little he has. I use parables when I speak to them because they look but do not see, they listen but do not hear or understand.' (Matt. 13:10-13)

Jesus uses parables to teach. Though the parables of Jesus date back two thousand years we find a timelessness about them. As we grow in maturity of faith, we get more insight from them.

We can say the same about the teachings of the Church. For nearly two thousand years the Church has given to the community of believers a body of teachings that helps explain and guide us in living the ways of faith. At times some of us may find difficulty in comprehending why the Church teaches as it does. However as we look back we can see the wisdom of that teaching and why we believe the Holy Spirit guides the Magisterium or teaching authority of the Church.

In July 1968 Pope Paul VI issued the encyclical *Humanae Vitae* (concerning Human Life). Recall that pivotal year of 1968. In our country the war in Vietnam raged on with no end in sight. Students on our college campuses protested the war and challenged all authority. Our cities burned from racial violence. We witnessed the assassination of men like Dr. Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy. Riots broke out at the Democratic Convention in Chicago. Lax moral conduct became the sexual revolution. The watchword among youth fascinated by the effects of hallucinatory drugs was, "Tune in, turn on, drop out."

The world witnessed war and revolution. The Soviets invaded Czechoslovakia ending a brief stint with democracy. The cold war raged on as the threat of nuclear annihilation affected our lives. The Church following Vatican II struggled with an explosion of radical changes and ideas. Historians consider 1968 a pivotal year in 20th century history. In this year of turbulence Pope Paul VI issued his papal encyclical on the regulation of human birth: *Humanae Vitae*. "THE POPE BANS THE PILL" ran the newspaper headlines. Catholics who preferred to get their information from a biased secular press overreacted. In Washington, D.C. some Catholics walked out of Mass at the cathedral as the archbishop tried to explain this complex document. Many Catholics had made up their minds and would not listen to the pope or the teaching of the Church. Now a generation later we can look back and evaluate the wisdom of this teaching.

The document begins with the statement "the most serious duty of transmitting human life, for which married persons are the free and responsible collaborators of God the Creator, has always been a source of great joy to them even if sometimes accompanied by not a few difficulties and by distress."

God is the creator of all life. Married couples collaborate with God by bringing human life into the world. They provide a long term stable environment for the development and nurturing of that life. Raising a family is not easy but at the same time children provide tremendous joy to couples who open themselves to life.

Married couples express their mutual love especially in the marital act, which opens itself to the possibility of new life. These two elements of conjugal love and life are two inseparable aspects of marriage. The problem with the artificial use of birth control is that it separates the sex act from the openness to life. Proponents of artificial birth control argued in 1968 that married couples would experience happier and more stable marriages once they were free of the tension over an unwanted pregnancy. They argued that this would result in fewer divorces. However, in the past generation our divorce rate has escalated to over 50% of all marriages. These same advocates added that artificial birth control would result in fewer out-of-wedlock pregnancies. Today the single-parent mother has become the new poverty class in the U.S. We have millions of babies born out of wedlock despite the easy availability of artificial birth control.

Humanae Vitae did not condone couples in marriage having children without responsibility. Couples could space children: "If, then, there are serious motives to space out births, which derive from the physical or psychological conditions of husband and wife, or from external conditions, the Church teaches that it is then licit to take into account the natural rhythms immanent in the generative functions, for the use of marriage in the infecund periods only, and in this way to regulate birth without offending [these] moral principles."

This method of family planning which employs the natural periods of infertility in the woman's ovulation cycle, often draws snickers from Catholics who recall the old rhythm method. For many couples this method did not work. New methods such as the sympto-thermal method provide couples with a safe means of expressing their love in the marriage act while avoiding an unplanned pregnancy. This natural method differs radically from artificial birth control in its effects and intent.

In NFP the couple chooses to abstain from the marital act when it would not be prudent for them to conceive another child. They do nothing to prevent a new human life from beginning in a freely chosen marital act. They choose to engage in the marital act when the wife is not fertile because this act has purposes other than procreation.

Contracepting couples, on the other hand, choose to engage in sexual union, reasonably anticipating that by doing so new human life will begin. They choose to do something, prior to, during, or subsequent to this freely chosen marital act precisely to prevent this life from beginning. They do not open themselves to the possibilities of new life and remove God from the process.

While the document stresses the cause and effect of the evils of artificial birth control, I find the most prophetic words in the document are, "it is also to be feared that the man, growing used to the employment of anti-conception practices, may finally lose respect for the woman and, no longer caring for her physical and psychological equilibrium, may come to the point of considering her as a mere instrument of selfish enjoyment, and no longer as his respected and beloved companion."

I have seen confirmation of these words in my work with high school girls. Girls feel pressured into premarital sex by both boyfriends and female peers. I recall a junior in high school asking me in front of her class, "Is it a sin to have sex with your boyfriend if you don't enjoy it?" I told her to think about what she asked me. If her boyfriend pressures her into unwanted sex then maybe she should drop him as a boyfriend. If her friends pressured her to prove herself as a woman by engaging in unwanted sex then maybe they are not very good friends.

Women as sex objects rather than as partners in a love relationship goes beyond the high school years. I see it in the ever-increasing tendency for couples to enter into non-committal live-in

relationships. Why get married and have children if the sexual aspect of married life can be fulfilled while avoiding any of the responsibilities? We live in a society that avoids long-term commitments. Why commit yourself to someone who will readily meet your needs without such a commitment?

As Catholics the Church asks us to trust its teachings. *Humanae Vitae* is no exception. Look at the results of the past few decades. We find that over 50% of all marriages in the U.S. end in divorce. Yet in 92% of those divorced marriages we find that either one or both of the parties do not practice their religion. That divorce rate reflects the numbers of Catholics divorcing as well. Studies show that married couples who have a strong religious faith produce marriages with the greatest degree of fulfillment.

Recent history reflects the fact that many of the warnings the pope mentions in *Humanae Vitae* have come true. Women have lost their special place as partners in a loving marital relationship and as collaborators in procreation and have found themselves in the unenviable position of sex objects.

Proponents of artificial birth control argued in 1968 that with the fear of pregnancy diminished, women could engage in sex freely without consequences. A generation later we find divorces at an all time high, sexually transmitted diseases ravishing our nation and the effects of broken marriages affecting our youth.

When the Church teaches, we must assume that it teaches what God expects of us. When we choose to go our own way we unfortunately must pay the price for our sins. Those who pay the price are not just those who willingly disregard such teaching but the innocent as well.

Jesus gave to the apostles and the Church the “*mysteries of the reign of God*.” As the Church shares with us these mysteries we recall the words of Jesus: “*But blest are your eyes because they see and blest are your ears because they hear*” (Matt. 13:16). Over the past few decades, many Catholics in their blindness and deafness have chosen to ignore this teaching of the Church. We can only wonder what our society might be like today if people had listened to that teaching in 1968.

Discussion Questions:

- (1) Discuss the relationship between the Gospel reading (Matthew 13:1-23) and Father Austin’s focus on the negative consequences of contraception.

- (2) In what ways does contraception lead to the objectification and exploitation of women?

Proclaiming Truth in and out of Season

By

Father John Bateman

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You all just did an amazing thing, and you probably don't even realize you did it. I just proclaimed a Gospel that says, "Jesus said to his apostles, I come not for peace, but for division. Mother shall be against daughter and father against son." And when I finished the Gospel I announced it by saying "The Gospel of the Lord." And you all responded, "Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ." Praise to you for *this* reading? Are you crazy?! Thank you, Jesus, for giving us words of division and strife and difficulty! Really? Yes! You proclaimed "Praise to you Lord, and thank you for giving us these words, for proclaiming yourself an object of division, not of peace." But what kind of peace is Jesus talking about? What division does He refer to? Well, it's not the peace that this world knows. We need to understand what kind of peace and division Jesus speaks about today. Our readings wonderfully explain to us exactly what division and peace Jesus is talking about, and it begins in today's first reading.

The prophet Jeremiah. To understand this reading, we must first put it into context. Jeremiah was one called by God to proclaim and speak God's word to His people, Israel. He was called by God while he was still very young. In his early days, Jeremiah, faithful to God's word, proclaimed peace and prosperity and joy to the people of Israel. He was loved by the people and by the king because he spoke words of great comfort and hope to the people. But, as time passed, a new king came to power who was not as faithful to God as was the previous one. At the same time, Israel was invaded by Assyria, so they were living as a people in occupation. The faith of the Hebrews did not agree with that of the Assyrians, and they began to suffer greatly under their oppressors. In order to bring about peace in the land, the king of Israel began to make some concessions to his occupying force. "OK, we'll give in on this point of faith, if you will stop sending invading armies into our territory." "We'll give in on this matter of faith if you will just give us food when we are hungry." In order to bring about peace and stability, the king of Israel gave in on important matters of faith and began to water it down.

Jeremiah witnessed all this and, still faithful to God's word, proclaimed to the king and to all the people of Israel what the Lord God said. Rather than words of comfort and prosperity, Jeremiah spoke words of doom. "O King, you and the entire nation of Israel will suffer greatly and be destroyed for your lack of faith and trust in the Lord God." The king and the people no longer liked what Jeremiah had to say. He was despised because he no longer spoke comforting words, but words of destruction. He was hated by the people because they didn't like what they heard.

So, as we hear in today's reading, they lowered Jeremiah into the cistern so that he might die. They told Jeremiah to stop speaking words of ill, because he was demoralizing the troops who were there to protect them. He refused to be silent because he was speaking God's word. For this, they put him in the cistern to die—because he proclaimed the truth of God's words—and the people didn't like it. Jeremiah, at the beginning of his ministry as prophet, spoke words of truth that the people liked, but once that word became more difficult, they hated him, even though he still spoke God's word. He became a source, not of peace, but of division among the people. This is what Jesus is talking about.

Jesus Himself was a source of division and conflict. The Jewish leaders did not want to hear what Jesus had to say. Yet, He persisted in speaking the truth. He could, at any moment, have decided that the risks were too great, the ridicule too excessive. He could have decided to speak

other words, words that were not true, and so save His life. But He knew that He must remain faithful to God's word, despite disfavor, opposition and possible death. We must do the same.

The Church today continues to be a source of conflict and division among the peoples of the world. It is always interesting to watch reactions when the Pope or the Church makes a statement on morality. Many in the world begin to laugh and ridicule the Church, saying things like, "Oh my, those bunch of old men in Rome don't have any idea what reality is. They should just get with the times and leave the Middle Ages—after all, it's the 21st century! Don't they know that?" The Church, in her pronouncements, becomes a source of conflict and division, not only in the secular world, but also for many within the Church. And yet, she continues to speak what she knows to be the truth. She never concedes to the pressures and influences of society to water down the truth or back away from it because it is too difficult. The Church consistently proclaims the truth.

There are many examples of this. Here's one. *Humanae Vitae* was an encyclical published some 30 years ago. In it, after consultation with special commissions, his own theologians and the People of God, Pope Paul VI proclaimed (infallibly) that artificial birth control is intrinsically evil and not permissible. Many immediately scoffed and ridiculed the Church and Paul VI for his outdated thinking. However, we have come, in the course of these 30 odd years, to see the truth of what Paul proclaimed. The proponents and supporters of contraceptives had made certain claims. But Paul VI prophetically spoke of them saying effectively, "If you accept as your truth that artificial contraceptives are okay, there are some grave consequences to that error."

For example, the supporters of contraception boldly proclaimed that allowing their use would reduce the number of unwanted pregnancies. Paul VI said no. He has proven to be correct. In a 1996 article in U.S. News and World Report, it was reported that in 1995 there were 1.4 million abortions in this country and 4 million births. Some 25 years after contraceptives were accepted by many in society, the number of unwanted children has *not* been reduced. When 25% of those conceived are murdered through abortion, have we truly reduced the number of unwanted pregnancies? No, we've just killed them. Paul VI stated that if contraceptives were permitted, women would suffer great harm to their very dignity as persons. The supporters of birth control, on the other hand, predicted that contraceptives would finally give women control and "reproductive rights" equal with that of men. Has this happened? No. Women are now treated with far less respect than they were. Men can now look at women, not as human persons with dignity and honor that should be cherished, but rather as objects of their desires. Women have become mere objects, and not the fully emancipated persons so many predicted. Many women bought this false prediction hook, line and sinker, and now they allow themselves to be treated, not with dignity and respect, but as mere objects—to be used and then thrown away.

I believe that after three decades, we can look back to Paul VI and say, "*Humanae Vitae* was right! Paul VI was right!" Despite all the negative publicity the Church took for this encyclical and teaching, she nevertheless continued, and still continues, to proclaim the truth that artificial birth control is intrinsically evil. Many in the secular world, and even in the Church, could not accept this. Even prominent Catholic theologians publicly denounced the Church's teaching. But the past several decades have proven that Paul VI was right. The Church, despite all that she suffered, continued to teach the truth.

There are many other examples, just within *Humanae Vitae*, but there are other teachings of the Church which are just as unpopular in society today, and for which the Church is ridiculed and is a source of division and conflict in our world. For example, the current debate on stem-cell research. President Bush, while he was in Rome, went to see the Holy Father and asked his opinion. I can imagine that Pope John Paul II said to him, "Dub-ya, no! It is morally wrong!"

“But how can this be so?”, many ask, “There can be such great medical advances as a result of this research.” True, there could be, but we must focus on a much more basic concept—the dignity of every human person from the moment of conception. At conception, there is a separate vulnerable and dependant life, which differs from both mother and father. There is a new life, which is present in every embryo. To do research on embryonic stem cells, we must kill and destroy this new life. We must violate every core principle of the dignity of human life. This cannot be allowed. It’s a very dangerous area. So, are we not to have scientific progress? Of course we are, but with restraint and respect for life. The question becomes so arbitrary. I have a bad heart; shall we kill our lector who has a good heart in order that I could have it? What about one of our Special Ministers of Holy Communion, how about one of our servers—couldn’t I get one of their hearts? The question, who lives and who dies in the name of scientific research or progress or treatment of ills becomes very arbitrary, and very dangerous.

Many other teachings of the Church continue to be a source of conflict and division in the world and in the Church. The teachings on homosexuality, pre-marital sex, cohabitation, capital punishment, euthanasia, the Church’s documents on economic justice or the rights of third world countries and indebtedness are all teachings that are ridiculed, at best, if not completely ignored, because the world doesn’t like what it hears. Too bad! It’s the truth, and the Church will continue to proclaim it, in season and out of season. The Church, I have come to firmly believe, proclaims the truth to us—a truth that, at times, is very difficult to understand and perhaps very difficult to live out—but it is truth nonetheless. These are truths which *must* be proclaimed. The Church, like Jeremiah, like Jesus Himself, is unwilling to compromise the truth to bring about peace. She continues to be a source of division and of conflict because she proclaims the truth that has been revealed to us.

Let’s face it, some Church teachings are extremely difficult. They even cause great conflict and division within us. “How can this be so?” we ask ourselves. Yet the Church persists in proclaiming the truth. I’ll be honest, while I was in seminary, I chose to do a concentration in morality, not so that I could boldly proclaim what the Church taught, but so that I, along with the rest of the world, could say, “Oh, come on! We’re living in the modern world now not the 1200’s!” But, through study and prayer and being open to the Spirit, I have come to believe firmly that what the Church teaches *is* indeed the truth and we cannot compromise it, or we risk loosing everything, even eternal life. Many of us struggle with issues, with various teachings of the Church, and that’s okay, so long as we are striving to understand why the Church teaches as she does. It may take an entire lifetime just to begin to understand something the Church teaches; that’s okay. But we must, in all things, seek the truth and strive to live it.

To be in error about the truth is one thing. To know the truth and do or proclaim otherwise is another. We know the truth. The Church proudly and pastorally proclaims the truth—we have it! But do we choose to ignore it? Beware. We are falling into the trap. Like Jesus, like Jeremiah, we must boldly proclaim the truth without fear of what others will say or what will happen to us. We must be signs of contradiction, sources of division and conflict in our world by the way that we proclaim and live the truth in our lives.

Okay, this is extremely serious and difficult stuff, but Jesus, in the beginning of today’s Gospel, gives us words of great hope and encouragement. “I have come to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it was ablaze!” What’s He talking about? What fire? Don’t you remember the day of Pentecost, when those 12 scared and frightened men gathered in the upper room were filled with the Holy Spirit? “And tongues as of fire appeared over each of their heads and they were filled with the Holy Spirit.” Suddenly these men who were fearful for their very lives were out in the streets boldly proclaiming Christ crucified. We were filled with that same Spirit on the day of our baptism and given the same mission of being signs of contradiction, sources of conflict in our

world by proclaiming the truth. In the sacrament of confirmation, we were filled with those Gifts of the Spirit (wisdom, knowledge, courage, fear of the Lord) so that *we* could go out, boldly, and proclaim the truths of Jesus.

Jesus did not come to bring about a peace that is concession and that forgoes truth to get along. Jesus came to bring us the Truth, and it is our mission, as baptized members of Christ's Body, to proclaim and live that truth in our lives. Perhaps as we come forward today, as we come to this altar of sacrifice to be nourished and strengthened by Christ's Body and Blood, we need to pray along with Jesus that the fire of the Holy Spirit would be enkindled in us, and in all the world. We must pray that we will have the courage to boldly speak the truth, to not water it down, to not make concessions, but to live and proclaim the truth in our own lives. May the fire of the Spirit be enkindled in each of us, that we, like Jeremiah, like Jesus, boldly proclaim the truth, no matter what the cost, no matter what the conflict. If we do this, then the world will truly know peace—not the world's peace, but the peace which only God can give, the peace of His truth.

Discussion Questions:

- (1) Discuss the relationship between the Mass readings (Jeremiah 38:4-6,8-10 and Luke 12:49-53) and Father Bateman's focus on the objective ascendancy of truth over circumstances.

- (2) Why is it useless or unwise to seek peace by compromising the truth of the Church's teaching on contraception?

"Woman, How Great Is Your Faith!"

By

Father Phil Bloom

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Father Phil Bloom served as a Maryknoll priest associate in Peru from 1987 to 1994. He has founded a Family Planning Center named for his mother, Mary Bloom. The Mary Bloom Center, which includes a small clinic, continues to teach married couples and health professionals in the Billings Method of natural family planning.

Today we hear about one of the truly magnificent women of the Gospel. She was a Canaanite (a pagan people surrounding Israel) and she had one goal: the healing of her daughter who was gripped by a demon. When Jesus passed through her territory, she pled her case with him. The disciples wanted to stop her, even Jesus seemed to brush her aside: "It is not right to take the food of the children and give it to the dogs."

Here is where we see her true greatness. She could have been discouraged, she could have been sidetracked by a seeming offense and said: "Don't call me a dog." But the word "dog" admits a positive as well as negative sense, like in English we speak for example about a "lucky dog." So she took it in the best sense and said, "Yes, Lord, but even the dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their master's table."

And she received from Jesus his highest praise: "Woman, your faith is great!" And he healed her daughter. Jesus always saw beyond the surface. He knows what is in the heart of each one of us. He sees us not as focus groups, but as persons.

A couple weeks ago a national study tried to lump Catholic women together in a group. The Guttmacher study of some 1000 women who had abortions, said 29% of the abortions were procured by Catholic women. And then they attempted to make a connection between that statistic and the Church's teaching on birth control.

However they downplayed some facts from their own study. A woman who describes herself as religious, that is who practices her faith, whether Protestant or Catholic, is only 25% as likely to seek an abortion as the average. There is a big difference between a cultural Catholic and a practicing Catholic. To use a personal comparison: I might sometimes say I am a "Croatian" because my mom's parents came from that country, but if I meet a real Croatian, I recognize a huge difference.

It is similar between those who call themselves "Catholic" and those who are living and breathing their faith. Now, we don't reject a cultural Catholic, in fact, we're glad they acknowledge their baptism, but we want them to return to the *full* practice of their faith and start attending Mass; that makes all the difference.

A deep relation to Jesus through the Church he founded is what we offer. As he did for the daughter of the Canaanite, Jesus can free us. Jesus did not come to condemn, but to save. That applies even in the case of abortion. Some people have heard that abortion is one of the very few sins that incurs automatic excommunication. That is to underscore its seriousness—the taking of an innocent human life. However, you must also know the priest has authority to lift that excommunication in the sacrament of confession. What is more, in that sacrament Jesus gives not only his forgiveness but deep healing.

Since my return from Peru, I have seen how many of our young people, men as well as women, need that healing. Obviously not just for abortion, but a range of sins which affect our souls as was the case of that young woman gripped by a demon.

Part of the orientation we want to give to our young people is an understanding of their sexuality. Why God created us male and female. Our society is in deep trouble because we have lost that orientation. The terrible plague of abortion which I referred to is one symptom. But I want to be clear. The solution to abortion is not more birth control. In that same Guttmacher study *57% of the women who had abortions were using birth control in the month before they got pregnant.*

Those of us who are older can remember when the birth control pill was first introduced in the late 50's. It was presented as the solution to all our biggest problems: overpopulation, unwanted pregnancies, abortions, child abuse, large unhappy families, and above all marital tension between husband and wife. After 35 years of widespread use of the birth control pill and other forms of artificial contraception, I believe we are ready to ask: Is birth control really the solution or is it the problem?

An amazing article came out last month in U.S. News and World Report, not exactly a Catholic magazine. Lionel Tiger who is an evolutionary anthropologist asked why there has been so much family breakdown, male irresponsibility, single parents and abortion since the 1960's. He says the main reason is the massive use of the birth control pill.

There is an alternative. I had the opportunity to take the Creighton University course on Natural Family planning which is offered to doctors, nurses, clergy and NFP practitioners. There have been tremendous advances in Natural Family Planning since the 60s. I hope to say more about that in the future and certainly to share it with our engaged couples and any young married couples. I have also contacted some doctors, women gynecologists right here in Seattle who are willing to work with couples on using natural methods.

When I was in Peru I worked with a married couple and an obstetrician to teach Natural Family Planning. Some 100 couples participated. We also offered a class for young adults, singles, who wanted to be instructors or promoters. Not only young women, but young men attended. Of course the boys could not keep a personal chart as the girls could. So they asked their moms if they could do a chart for them. The course lasted six months and when it was over I asked one of the boys what he had learned. He said to me, "Father, I learned respect for women."

That is what our society needs—and that is what Natural Family Planning promotes. I am convinced that Jesus Christ and the teachings of the Church he founded are the solution to the problems of our society—and our own deepest personal needs.

Like the Caanaite woman we come to Jesus with our needs, with the needs of those we love. If we had her humility, we would also hear Jesus loving words, "Your faith is great. Your prayer is granted."

Discussion Questions:

- 1) Discuss the relationship between the Gospel reading (Matthew 15:21-28) and Fr. Bloom's focus on promoting means of Natural Family Planning that promote the dignity of the human person.

- (2) Why do you think the young man in Fr. Bloom's NFP class said that charting his mother's fertility cycle taught him respect for women?

Seek and You Shall Find: The Beauty of *Humanae Vitae*

By
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The Church is a mother to her children, and she will not give them evil gifts. When the People of God cry out: "Show us Jesus Christ! Preach the Gospel to us! Tell us how to attain eternal life," the Church responds, bolstered by her charism of infallibility, with the authentic Gospel entrusted to her by Christ himself. Her goal, like any mother's, is only that her children be happy and fulfilled. Our Lord said: *Ask and you will receive that your joy may be full.* (Jn. 16.24) He sought to impose no useless burdens on his disciples, but only a light burden and a sweet yoke. Holy Mother Church does not wish to bind up unnecessary burdens either, as the Pharisees did, but she will preach the whole truth, *in season and out of season.*

This weekend the Church celebrates the 30th anniversary of a landmark encyclical letter, written by Paul VI, on the regulation of procreation. This document, known as *Humanae Vitae*, affirmed that God, in his wisdom, arranged that man and woman should cooperate through an act of love with the creation of each new human being. If spouses, consciously and freely, do anything to frustrate the life-giving potential of their married love (that is, by contraception or sterilization), they sin gravely. Today we celebrate the courage of Paul VI in reminding the world of this truth, thanking God for his enlightenment of the Church on this matter. We also pray for the many Catholics who have failed to understand or accept this essential element of the Church's moral doctrine. Many have suspected their mother of giving them a snake when they asked for a fish. Let us pray for these wayward children that the Father give them the Holy Spirit as he has generously promised to do for all who ask!

At the beginning of the 20th century there was nearly unanimous agreement by religious and civil leaders that contraception was a moral and social evil. In 1930 the Anglican church...wavered and allowed contraception in certain cases. Pius XI reacted immediately with a strong affirmation of the sanctity of marriage, denouncing contraception as directly opposed to it. In the 1960's, Paul VI, while always affirming that he would never consider revising Pius XI's position, undertook a study to see if the new hormonal pills were of a different ethical nature than the contraceptive practices condemned throughout the history of the Church. He declared, 30 years ago yesterday, that they were essentially the same, that is, equally opposed to the sanctity of marriage and the good of the spouses. In so doing, Pope Paul VI opened up for the Church a splendid era of clearer theological understanding of marriage and family and great strides in the development of natural methods of regulating procreation.

It is not possible, of course, nor appropriate to try to explain now the many theological, psychological, social and medical reasons which combine in a sort of symphony to show that Paul VI was indeed speaking on behalf of the Creator and Redeemer of Life when he reaffirmed the unlawfulness of contraception. Rather than present arguments, let us consider the fruit that has come from the general acceptance of contraception, for from its fruits we can know the tree.

The first bad fruit that Paul VI predicted in his letter was promiscuity. Certainly, the last 30 years have seen a dramatic increase in that. Suffice to point out that there is a billboard on highway 895, advertising paternity testing, that asks "Who is the Daddy?" This would have been unthinkable in 1968, but we are not outraged, because we have grown so dulled and deadened by slow increases of immorality.

A related bad fruit is divorce. As soon as the Anglicans allowed contraception in 1930, the divorce rate among Protestants began to rise. A few decades later, when Catholics began to use contraception in significant numbers, the divorce rate among us began to rise, too. Why? The couple cuts itself off from God, the source of love. The man begins to objectify his wife. Her dignity as a woman, the giver of life, is devalued. She feels unloved, and distance between them grows. An authority on love, Mother Teresa, explains: “In destroying the power of giving life or loving through contraception, a husband or wife is doing something to self. This turns the attention to self, and so it destroys the gift of love in him and her. In loving, the husband and wife turn the attention to each other, as happens in natural family planning, and not to self, as happens in contraception.”

Mother Teresa continues, mentioning the third bad fruit of contraception. “Once that loving is destroyed by contraception, abortion follows very easily. That’s why I never give a child [up for adoption] to a family that has used contraception, because if the mother has destroyed the power of loving, how will she love my child?” And so it is that contraception leads not only to divorce but also abortion. Our present Pope affirms “[T]he popularization of artificial contraception leads to abortion, for both lie—though at different levels—on the same line of fear of the child, rejection of life, lack of respect for the act or the fruit of the union, such as it is established between man and woman by the creator of nature.” Technology has now blurred the distinction further so that many products marketed and used as contraceptives actually work by killing newly conceived babies before they can implant. In fact there are many more abortions caused imperceptibly by what is called “contraception” than by surgical means. Thus, tragically, many Catholics have become active cooperators in the culture of death.

Yet there is hope. There are some who have struggled, in Pope Paul VI’s words, “against the tide of thought and opinion in a world of paganized behavior.” As the Lord surveys the Sodom of our time, he may be able to find “ten just men” amongst it. There are some brave and generous Christians who will always be “the soul of the world,” a witness of authentic love in a culture of hedonism and death.

We must convince the world that God has not given his children, through Paul VI, a scorpion when they asked for an egg. He knows what is good for us; he made us. The Church’s stand on contraception is not a cold, useless, man-made rule. Rather, *Humanae Vitae* is part of the Gospel law of liberty; it liberates couples for authentic Christian love. It is possible and joyful to obey for those who *have been raised with [Christ] through their belief in the power of God*. Let no one think that he cannot fulfill the demands of an authentically human life. As John Paul II encouraged some Indonesian bishops: “Let us never fear that the challenge is too great for our people. They were redeemed by the precious blood of Christ. They are his people... It is he, Jesus Christ, who will continue to give the grace to his people to meet the requirements of his word... what is impossible with man is possible with God.” (AAS 71, 1979, p. 1423)

What remains for us is to be what we are: a new creation, a people set apart: “*Be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind,*” said St. Paul. If you cannot see the beauty of *Humanae Vitae*: *seek and you shall find*. If you cannot imagine ever being able to live it: *Ask and you shall receive*. Never think you have no alternative to sin, but *knock and the door will be opened to you*.

Discussion Questions:

- (1) Discuss the relationship between the Gospel reading (Luke 11:1-13) and Father Cumming’s focus on the negative fruits of contraception.

- (2) According to Mother Teresa, what is the difference between contraception and NFP and how might this difference lead to abortion?
- (3) How does contraception destroy “the power of giving life and loving” in the first place?

Children Make Us More Human

By

Father Brian Doerr

Saint Mary's Cathedral, Lafayette, Indiana

For many years now, I have been troubled by the manner in which people sometimes enter a restaurant and until recently, I have never understood why. Have you ever noticed what occurs if you happen to park in a restaurant parking lot while another car simultaneously does the same? You have experienced this: the driver of the other car, and his or her party, will have the car unloaded and the party will, without looking at you, walk quickly, while consciously maneuvering to arrive at the restaurant door before you. Once they have reached the door, they ease a bit and casually walk in...before you, of course. Time and time again, I have seen this occur.

The object of the game is getting into the restaurant before the other people so you do not have to wait for a table and can receive your food before everyone else. There is lacking in this, a sense of etiquette, decorum or decency. And why does this "trivial little matter" bother me? Just recently I linked this with a larger trend in our culture, and now I see it as a symptom of something much greater.

We have, as a culture and as an economic system, developed a frightening sense of competition. The people who live in our world are in a desperate mode of heightened rivalry. Why can a man not rush to the door of a restaurant and hold the door for his fellow citizens and allow them to pass first? The answer: because he is in *competition* with them and he must be careful not to lose his place. Competition is no longer confined to sports or the marketplace. Needless to say, the United States has become quite good at competing. As a nation, we compete to consume a disproportionately large share of the world's natural resources.

As individuals, we compete to make more money in order to acquire a greater portion of goods and services. We compete with each other for fame and prestige. We compete with the clothes we purchase and the make-up we wear. We compete to have the best technological equipment, the best automobiles and the best and largest houses. Simply watch advertisements with a critical eye and see how marketers are manipulating us to compete against one another.

No longer do we see our neighbor as a brother or sister made in the image and likeness of God to be respected and treated with dignity; he or she is a competitor—competing to consume or steal what we have acquired or want to acquire. The implications run deep. Our Holy Father, the defender of all human life, reminds us that:

Despite their differences of nature and moral gravity, contraception and abortion are often closely connected, as fruits of the same tree. It is true that in many cases contraception and even abortion are practiced under the pressure of real life difficulties, which nonetheless can never exonerate from striving to observe God's law fully. Still, in very many other instances such practices are rooted in a hedonistic mentality unwilling to accept responsibility in matters of sexuality, and they imply a self-centered concept of freedom, *which regards procreation as an obstacle to personal fulfillment*. The life which could result from a sexual encounter thus becomes an enemy to be avoided at all costs, and abortion becomes the only possible decisive response to failed contraception (EV 13).

Rather than embracing the gift of the unborn child, we have come, as a culture, to see the child as a competitor—both on the national level as well as the personal level—“an obstacle to personal fulfillment.”

One of the most outspoken promoters of abortion throughout the world has used the United Nations to promote abortion because, as she claims, the world does not have the resources to sustain its population growth. She, and others from our country, have targeted third world countries in particular because we do not want “those people” to consume “our resources.” Yet she lives in, not one, but two mansions: one in California and one in Montana. And we wonder, if the world cannot sustain such a great population because of its limited resources, why does she not remove herself from her mansions and freely share the resources she selfishly consumes? Because people have become competitors. She is unwilling to allow life as life may mean the loss of her “things.”

Furthermore, if we look past the continuous lies and deceit of the pro-death lobby, we can see on the personal level that the unwanted child is unconsciously perceived as a competitor to his/her own parents. The child competes against the mother and father’s own desires, material goods, career plans, financial resources and personal agendas. The killing of over seven thousand weak and defenseless human beings every day because they compete against our own self-centered desires is a crime beyond reckoning.

In addition, children are no longer considered miraculous gifts of God, they have become products. If wanted, these products can be purchased (custom ordered) through artificial reproduction or, if unwanted, they can be aborted or prevented by contraception. A wise man, David C. Stolinsky in an article entitled, “*A Nation of Narcissists?*” quipped, “Narcissists view their children the way they view their BMW—prized possessions to be shown off. Like the BMW, the kids are pampered but cared for by others, from nannies to daycare providers to teachers, not to mention math tutors and soccer coaches. Many of the joys and pains of having kids are experienced by others. And kids are under pressure to get into the best schools, to provide more grounds for boasting, and to make more money (*New Oxford Review*, June 2002).”

Is it not time to heed the voice of St. Elizabeth Anne Seton who said, “live simply, that others might live?” Is it not time we cease looking at our brothers and sisters and sons and daughters as competitors for our resources or products to own, and begin to love them as we love ourselves—just as Jesus taught us?

The mystery of parenthood is not difficult to discern. A child comes into our life to crush our selfishness and makes us more human—loving, generous, patient, kind and selfless humans. When the baby begins to cry at 3 AM, a parent learns selflessness, just as I learn selflessness when someone is dying at the hospital at 3 AM. Parents learn selflessness when their six-year-old wants him or her to read her a book, just as I learn selflessness when a teenager wants to go to Confession after I’ve already heard two hours of confessions. And parents learn selflessness when money must be saved for college or for insurance for the children, just as I learn selflessness when financially limited by my attempt to live simply like Jesus.

I learned a valuable lesson in my last parish. Every Sunday after Mass I was greeted by a man named Doug who was mildly mentally handicapped. Most people today would consider him a drain on society, not contributing to the welfare of the state and worse, competing for the resources that we desire to consume. Many people like Doug are aborted every day—their parents not willing to subject themselves to the trials of raising a special needs baby for such “little” reward.

Doug, to the shock of his family, had a massive heart attack and died suddenly. It was tremendously difficult for his family and friends and the day of the funeral saw a church packed with people: the largest funeral I had witnessed during my time as a priest. Men and women alike outwardly mourned Doug's passing.

The conclusion is not hard to draw. In the eyes of the world, Doug did nothing but consume our precious little resources. But if Doug, indeed, contributed nothing to our culture, our economy, or our society, he certainly taught a huge number of people how to love. In a sense, he was an apostle of love, and the day he was buried, his disciples came in large numbers to say good-bye.

We can learn from Doug that all people are made in God's image and have infinite value and to compete against our brother or sister is to reject all that Christ Jesus revealed to us. As an old Dominican priest once impressed upon me, "be generous with God," he whispered as if telling a secret, "and he will be generous with you." No better way to summarize the calling of parents, priests or any worthwhile vocation.

Discussion Questions:

- (1) Discuss the relationship between the Gospel reading and Fr. Doerr's focus on the humanizing effect of children on parents and society.
- (2) How does Saint Elizabeth Anne Seton's exhortation, "Live simply that others might live," apply to our openness to new life?

Revisiting *Humanae Vitae*

By

Most Reverend John F. Donoghue, D.D.

Archbishop of Atlanta

Closing of the Conference on *Humanae Vitae*
July 21, 2001

Dear Friends in Christ,

Thirty-three years ago, this month, the birth of *Humanae Vitae*, Pope Paul VI's definitive encyclical on the transmission of human life, was not accomplished without pain and suffering. I remember well, the travails that our Mother, the Church, went through as this child of wisdom made its way into a world already set on a course of opposition and rejection.

I was Chancellor of the Archdiocese of Washington at the time, and as events unfolded within a few days, I realized that the Church, both the Faithful and the Clergy, and that I myself, would forever be changed by the publication of this momentous and decisive document.

For it was no surprise, but still a great disappointment, when within a day of the publication of *Humanae Vitae*, more than sixty priests of the Archdiocese of Washington, announced, by publishing it in the *Washington Post*, their opposition to the teachings of the Holy Father, of the Church, of the magisterium, and we must believe, of the Holy Spirit.

The Cardinal Archbishop of Washington, Patrick O'Boyle, with no happiness about it, called me into his office, and said, "We cannot let this go by. Call every one of the priests named in the protest. Tell them I am suspending their faculties to celebrate the Sacraments, and let them know that I am ready and anxious to speak with each of them individually."

It was undoubtedly one of the hardest moments he had ever faced, and in assisting him at this difficult moment, it was also a moment in time that changed me — for it left upon me the scars of battle, scars we must and will win, if we engage to defend the Church against her opponents, and if we strive to win back, those who have set themselves against the Church and her God-given teachings.

The Church struggles still with the difficulties of putting *Humanae Vitae* into practice, and part of the reason we are here is to pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit as we attempt, in our own time, to make this teaching a more accepted and vital part of the Church's ongoing life and mission.

But even Pope Paul VI, in his prophetic wisdom, possibly did not see all the trends, all the movements, all the individual perversities that were to be raised against the sanctity of life in the years since he spoke so forcefully against the comparatively simple sin of artificial contraception.

The evolving disregard for the conception and generation of life, has been, in large part, responsible for even more outrageous acts against life in other phases of its existence. Abortion and euthanasia, the front and back doors of the house of the culture of death, have now opened to reveal rooms of more insidious evil, harbored between these two portals of hell. Eugenics, genetic engineering, cloning, embryonic stem cell research; these are the inevitable progeny of man's arrogant assumption of the management of life, which began with the pro-contraception

movements.

Where can it lead from here? We can only wonder, and acknowledge the aptness of the old prayer, which describes the “wickedness and snares of the devil,” and admit that the genius of man, when turned to evil, is indeed amazing, and true to the nature of original sin, diabolical as well.

But for the Church, for Catholics, for all spouses who live in the family of the Church, and who wish to make peace with their consciences, *Humanae Vitae* is far more than a prophecy and a recollection of what could and what did go wrong. *Humane Vitae* is in fact, the roadmap to marital sanctity and marital stability—and more—it is the map which will ultimately lead to a better world, at least for those who follow its guiding lights.

In this Sunday’s Gospel, we hear of a decisive moment in the lives of our Lord’s disciples, not a moment of conflict limited to Mary and Martha, not just our Lord’s solution to the anger of Martha and perhaps the satisfaction of Mary, but a moment of decision for all Christians. Which is to be the most important focus in life—living a life in service to goodness, or living a life in service to the Lord? The two seem close, and in some cases, seem to be the same thing. But they are not. Ethical people are good people—and we get along with them, respect them, and live with them in peace. But Christians are people who are ethical *because they are the Lord’s*. The goodness which brings salvation comes from devotion to the Lord. Goodness in and of itself saves no one. Christ did not say, “Do good, and that will take care of your sins.” Christ said, “*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind... and love your neighbor as yourself.*” It is clear that love of God must come first, and then the rest will follow.

Such a moment of decision is reflected in the teachings of *Humanae Vitae*. Plenty of seemingly responsible husbands and wives decide, on their own, that for the good of everyone involved, they must limit the number of lives they will conceive, and that the easiest, most practical way of doing this is by artificial contraception, the unnatural interruption of the act of conception. To do this is to commit the fault of Martha—to put convenience, to put material considerations, to put comfort above the first duty of marriage, which is, to love and serve God by doing His will. And His will, as expressed by the Church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, is not to interfere unnaturally with the generation of life. *Humanae Vitae* is the blueprint for incorporating the will of God into the life of Christian marriage. And the fruits of such obedience are beautifully laid out by Pope Paul VI, when he writes:

...discipline imbues love with a deeper human meaning. Although self-control requires continuous effort, it also helps the spouses become strong in virtue and makes them rich with spiritual goods. And this virtue fosters the fruits of tranquility and peace in the home and helps in the solving of difficulties of other kinds. It aids spouses in becoming more tender with each other and more attentive to each other. It assists them in dispelling that inordinate self-love that is opposed to true charity. It strengthens in them an awareness of their responsibilities. And finally it provides parents with a sure and efficacious authority for educating their children. As their children advance through life they will come to a correct appreciation of the true goods of man and employ peacefully and properly the powers of their mind and senses.

Dear friends, these are beautiful promises, but they are promises based on the truth of God. Therefore, they can and do come true, not without difficulty, as Pope Paul reminds us, nor “without the help of God, who upholds and strengthens the good will of men.”

May this conference, may the efforts of all who have joined in planning and attending it, may the

example that you, our Catholic husbands and wives, set by the way you live your own marriages, and above all, may the help of God, we constantly implore, reinvigorate in our local Church an awareness and appreciation for the great gift of *Humanae Vitae*, Pope Paul VI's finest and most enduring effort on behalf of the People of God, the Holy Catholic Church.

And may the fruits of tranquility and peace, harvested in your hearts and your homes, by surrendering to the sharp sweetness of God's law, bring new life, new compassion, and new wisdom to the world around us.

This we pray, in our Lord's name. Amen.

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Discussion Questions:

- (1) Discuss the relationship between the Gospel reading (Luke 10:38-42) and Archbishop Donoghue's thesis that holiness in married love proceeds from love of God rather than our purely human attempts to control and manipulate the goods and requirements of marriage.
- (2) Archbishop Donoghue cites Pope Paul VI's teaching that self-control in married sexuality "provides parents with a sure and efficacious authority for educating their children" (n.21) How might this statement hold true?

God's Plan for Human Life

By
Fr. Matthew Habiger, O.S.B., PhD
St. Benedict's Abbey, Atchison, Kansas

Introduction

We are now in the first Easter Season of the New Millennium. After the great Jubilee Year of grace, we are still reflecting upon the significance of Easter and all that God has done for us through the life, death and resurrection of His Son. We know that remarkable things lie in store for us. With six billion people alive today, and with the advantages of education, science and technology, we have every reason to believe that the 21st Century will either be a time of heightened religious experience or a time of great peril.

God's Plan for Human Life Reaffirmed by Easter

The events of Holy Week and Easter reaffirm God's original plan for us. Jesus came into the world to overcome the damage caused by our sin, the damage caused by our choosing evil over goodness, by preferring our ways over God's ways. We had fallen into a pit out of which we were unable to climb. This necessitated that the Son of God Himself come into our world as one of us, that He teach us how to live this life well, that is, to live the Christian life, and eventually that He lay down His life for us. Remember, Jesus died for our sins once and forever. Christ's body was important for him in His Resurrection and in our Redemption. This tells us something about the importance of our own bodies.

We Are Bodied Persons

As human beings, we need to understand our condition as a person who has a body. Our bodies are very important. By means of our body, we are present to the world, and the world is present to us. There was never a time when we were absent from our bodies. Our bodies have a definite life cycle which everyone experiences.

We also know that our bodies are gifts to us from God, just as is human life and good health. We are expected to understand our bodies, our bodied condition as a bodied person. We must learn how to respect our bodies and cooperate in allowing our bodies to assist us in living our lives in this world well. We are talking here about God's plan for human life, human love and human family.

An Analogy: The Gift of Taste and Eating

We usually take good health for granted, and then begin to abuse it. Take, for example, the gift of taste and eating. We know that we must eat in order to nourish our bodies. Eating is also a very social event. Mealtimes are times when families and friends come together to strengthen their bondedness. Tasty, succulent food enhances the meal.

But if the pleasure of eating becomes an end in itself, if we eat just for the sake of eating, then very soon we do real damage to ourselves and to our bodies. Obesity results, in most cases, from abuses of the body. Wealthy nations have a real problem with obesity. God's plan for eating is

that we eat a well-balanced diet and use moderation. Eat for a purpose; don't make the purpose of life mere eating.

The Gift of Fertility and Human Sexuality

In a similar way God has a plan for our fertility and human sexuality. It is important to remember that our bodies and all that they contain are God's gift to us. We had nothing to do with the designing of our bodies; it was strictly God's plan. Parents have relatively little to contribute to the essential physical design of their child's body.

God most assuredly has a plan for our fertility and human sexuality. It is a very good plan. As intelligent and responsible human persons, we are able to know God's plan, to appreciate its goodness, and then to freely choose to live by it.

God's plan includes allowing us to be co-creators with Him, and to provide a means of close bonding between a husband and wife. Although our sexuality provides great pleasure, pleasure is a "companion good" and not the chief focus. Like eating, or drinking, or any other physical activity, sex can be abused. And if the conception of a new human person is involved, a person endowed with our own human dignity, then terrible harm can be done. If a person can be hurt badly by being used as an object for someone's gratification, then there is nothing trivial about sexual behavior.

Our world is very confused about God's plan for fertility and human sexuality. Some people think that they can make up their own rules and define sex anyway they want. It is just a matter of preference or choice. Something like ordering items from a menu in a restaurant. They think this, despite the fact that the human person is the only thing God created for its own sake. "In His own image He made them male and female" (Gen 1:26). Only a person lives forever. Only a person can love and be loved. Only for the sake of a person with such dignity would God send His only Son into the world to atone for our sins by his own suffering and death.

God's Plan for Love, Life and Family = Chastity

My brothers and sisters, as we move into the new century we are encouraged to be a people of hope and expectation. We know that we have the potential of doing great good. We know that we have received many blessings from God, and that He expects great things from us—even difficult things.

We know that most of the problems on this earth are of our own making, and that we can both correct what is wrong and build up what is good and helpful to others. This requires that we learn God's plan for love, life and the family. It means the total gift of self by a man to his wife, and the total gift of self by a woman to her husband. This means no sex before marriage, and total fidelity within marriage. It means no abortion, sterilization or contraception. It means acquiring the virtue of chastity.

St. John Chrysostom suggests that young husbands should say to their wives: "I have taken you in my arms, and I love you, and I prefer you to my life itself... I place your love above all things, and nothing would be more bitter or painful to me than to be of a different mind than you" (CCC 2346).

Pope John Paul II speaks of fertility as part of mutual self-gift and enhancing the dignity of the human person: "The innate language (of the marital embrace) expresses the total reciprocal self-

giving of husband and wife. Contraception is an objectively contradictory language, namely, that of not giving oneself totally to the other. This leads not only to a positive refusal to be open to life but also to a falsification of the inner truth of conjugal love, which is called upon to give itself in personal totality” (FC 32, CCC 2370).

God wants what is best for His sons and daughters. He never asks the impossible—just the plain difficult. Chastity is a difficult virtue; it always has been. Chastity always benefits our marriages, our families, and the wider culture. The absence of chastity always brings great harm and misery to everyone it affects.

I encourage you, at the dawn of a new century and the new millennium, read the encyclical *Humanae Vitae*. It has a clear formula for happiness and well-being for everyone.

Easter means that we are called to be a people of hope and expectation. We have every right to be optimistic about the future. Indeed, we can be victorious in the struggle between good and evil. We can live a life pleasing to God and beneficial to ourselves. We can keep the Commandments and live the Christian life. This means everyone, since God’s call to holiness is universal. His call to holiness is given to everyone, to every culture and to every walk of life. In short, we are all called to become saints, a people who are very close to God.

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Discussion Questions:

- (1) Discuss the relationship between the Gospel reading (John 17:20-26) and Fr. Habiger’s focus on chaste and fruitful married love.
- (2) What do our bodies reveal to us about the nature and purpose of marital love?

Trinity Sunday Homily

By

Father Matthew Habiger, O.S.B., PhD

St. Benedict's Abbey, Atchison, Kansas

26 May 2002

This is Trinity Sunday. Following Ascension Thursday and Pentecost, it brings together the involvement of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit in our salvation. Remember: all three persons of the Blessed Trinity are involved with us, and we with them.

God is the most profound of all mysteries. He is the creator of the entire universe, all that exists. He created all the angels. He created the human race, beginning with our first parents, Adam and Eve. God is one. Christianity is monotheistic, not a polytheistic. But within the one Godhead there are three persons. Three persons in one God. In his full grandeur and complexity, God exceeds our limited vision and our poor understanding. But God has given us ways and means of knowing something about Him. The Father sent His Son among us as one of us. Jesus, in turn, taught us about the Father. And now the Holy Spirit helps us understand the full meaning of Jesus' words.

One very good way to explain the Holy Trinity today is to think of a *communion of persons*. We know something about what it means to enter into a communion with another person. We make the gift of ourselves to a friend, and accept the gift of our friend to us. There is a sharing of hearts, of minds, of wills, of our very person. Marriage, as God designed it, is the clearest example of this: the husband makes the total gift of himself to his spouse. She accepts his gift, and then offers the total gift of herself to him. And he receives her, appreciating the rich significance of the gift of her person to him, a communion of persons.

Apply this now to God. Among the three persons of God, there is a total communion of love and life. The love of the Father and the Son issues forth in the person of the Holy Spirit. The love, life and creative energy among these three divine persons becomes one dynamic communion, one God: a communion of three persons in one God.

The Vatican II document, *Gaudium et spes*, speaks about God's design for the communitarian nature of the human vocation: "The Lord Jesus, when praying to the Father 'that they may all be one ... even as we are one' (Jn 17:21-2), has opened up new horizons closed to human reason by indicating that there is a certain similarity between the union existing among the divine persons and the union of God's children in truth and love. It follows, then, that if human beings are the only creatures on earth that God has wanted for their own sake, they can fully discover their true selves only in sincere self-giving" (24).

My brothers and sisters, I want to relate this "communion of persons," and this "making the gift of self" to *our situation in these times*. The recent sex scandals by some clergy are forcing us to re-examine God's plan for us as bodied persons. We recall that God alone designed human nature, and that He alone designs the moral order. He alone determines what is right and what is wrong.

I am going to talk about God's plan for human love and life, about chastity, and about *violations against God's plan, especially contraception and sterilization*. You probably have not heard these topics discussed before from this pulpit, or for that matter from other pulpits. And for that

we priests are guilty in the negligence of our duty to teach clearly God's plan for human love and human life. I ask you now to forgive us our negligence in performing our duties.

This is a time for all of us to return to the basics about our sexuality, about the fact that we are bodied persons. The natural attraction between a man and a woman (Adam and Eve), the desire to become "one flesh" is good and noble. But this desire must be expressed according to God's design for human love and life. The only proper place for sex is in marriage. Outside of marriage sex is wrong and sinful. It violates God's plan for human love. Similarly, within marriage, God also has a plan. That plan calls for making the total gift of self from one spouse to another, a total sharing of one's self with one's spouse, a communion of persons. This sharing *includes our fertility*. Sex and fertility go together. We cannot hold back part of the gift and pretend we are giving and receiving the full gift of self.

When we reflect upon the nature of conjugal love, we soon realize that it is *both unitive* (love-giving) and *procreative* (life-giving). True love is always life-giving in one way or another. I am a celibate, but my love for you and for others is always life-giving. Contraception and sterilization always go wrong by withdrawing the total gift of self, by attacking the goodness of our fertility and considering it something evil to be destroyed, by refusing to be open to the gift of a new life.

The encyclical *Humanae Vitae* predicted the tragic results of widespread contraception: a weakening of moral discipline; a trivialization of human sexuality; the demeaning of women; marital infidelity; state sponsored programs of population control; the introduction of legalized abortion and euthanasia, the idea of unlimited dominion over one's body and life as seen now in genetic manipulation and embryo experimentation.

The teaching of *Humanae Vitae* honors married love, promotes the dignity of women, and helps couples grow in understanding the truth of their particular path to holiness. It is also a response to contemporary society's temptation to reduce life to a commodity.

My brothers and sisters, on this feast of the Blessed Trinity, I encourage you to learn more about God's wonderful plan for human life and human love, about marriage and family. Learn why men and women are the only creatures on earth God wanted for their own sake, and why we can fully discover our true selves only in sincere self-giving.

I encourage you to get a copy of *Humanae Vitae* and study it. It is a very clear statement of God's plan for human life and human love. I encourage you to learn about Natural Family Planning (NFP), God's way and nature's way of exercising responsible parenthood. NFP helps couples discover something of the richness of their being bodied persons, made "in the image and likeness of God."

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Discussion Questions:

- (1) What relation has Trinity Sunday to the issue of contraception?
- (2) In both of Fr. Habiger's homilies, he indicates that God has a plan for married love. Why is it so important to hold to this plan and not to deviate from it?

The Church's Moral Teaching on Contraception, Part I

By
Father Anthony Kopp, O. Praem.
St. Michael's Abbey, Norbertine Fathers of Orange County

This is the first homily of a three-part series given by Fr. Kopp, O. Praem., recorded at St. Kilian Church, Mission Viejo, CA.

Jesus gives a very stern warning this morning when He says that if he refuses to listen even to the Church then treat him as you would a gentile or tax collector. In other words Jesus was telling us if we refuse to listen to his Church, then we're in big trouble. There is one particular moral issue in which surveys, at least, show that many Catholics don't think or act in accordance with the teaching of the Church and that is rather unfortunate indeed. As a priest, of course, following the warning given by the prophet of today's first reading, I have to warn you that on this particular moral issue, many Catholics are off base. They are doing what is wrong and wicked.

Now, what is this moral issue? Probably a lot of you think Father is going to talk about abortion. No, I am not. I am going to talk about an issue which is more fundamental than that, which is morally evil, which opens the door to abortion in our country. It is a moral issue which I think is probably the most important issue today. This evil has done more to undermine our society and our Church than any other. It is so important, in fact that I am going to devote many homilies in a row to this topic. So by now you are probably wondering what is this moral issue?

Well, to introduce it I want to give a little quiz. It is a 3-question true/false quiz. Just answer on your own to yourself; don't shout out the answer.

No Christian church ever accepted contraception as morally permissible before 1930. Is that true or false?

A Protestant legislature, for a largely Protestant America, passed the anti-contraceptive laws of 19th century America, true or false?

The leaders of the Protestant Reformation were strongly opposed to unnatural forms of birth control, true or false?

Let's be honest. How many answered "true" to all 3 of those? That is correct, all 3 are true. It is a historical fact that no Christian church accepted contraception before 1930. In fact, up until 1930 every Christian church strongly condemned the use of unnatural forms of birth control. It was only in 1930 that the Lambeth Conference of the Anglican Church first allowed the use of such things in certain select cases. It is a historical fact in the last century, our Protestant legislatures passed laws which prohibited, under penalty of law, the purchase and manufacture or even possession of contraceptive devices. It was against the law. Finally the leaders of the Protestant Reformation and in particular, Martin Luther, strongly condemned the use of unnatural forms of birth control. So, we see that at least for nineteen hundred and thirty years of Christianity, contraception was condemned by all Christians and was seen as a great evil.

Now why did Christians teach that, and why does the Catholic Church today continue to teach that the use of unnatural forms of birth control is a grave moral evil? It is, in fact, a grave sin. Why does the Church teach that? Well, because of what God has revealed—and today in the remaining part of this homily, I want to sketch out to you where exactly God speaks to us about this issue.

Well, first of all, we need to keep in mind what God teaches us about human life and the value of human life, and His desire to see human life brought into this world. First, you may recall way

back in the Book of Genesis, the very first chapter after God has created Adam and Eve, God gave them a command which is recorded in the first Chapter and 28th verse of Genesis. God says this to Adam and Eve. God blessed them, saying, “be fertile and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it.” Be fertile and multiply, and if you read the 150 psalms, frequently God tells us there, that, children are His gifts. They are something to be treasured. For example, in Psalm 127 vs 3, God says this, “Behold sons and daughters are a gift from the Lord. The fruit of the womb is a reward.” In other words, children are a blessing. Now we need to keep this in mind because obviously we are living in a society that does not promote such a view. In fact, our Holy Father has told us over and over again that we are living, very sadly, in a culture of death, a society that promotes death.

Just yesterday I was reading about a Supreme Court decision in my home state of Wisconsin. Wisconsin is now the first state that has passed a law that requires a woman to have a 24-hour waiting period before she has an abortion. And the law in the state of Wisconsin says that a woman must be given an opportunity when she goes to an abortion clinic to hear the heartbeat of her unborn child. They have to allow her to hear that heartbeat, then give her time to make her decision. Well, pro-abortionists took that to the Supreme Court of Wisconsin, saying that was some sort of coercive pro-life conspiracy to eliminate abortions. That is ridiculous of course, but it shows just how far we have come now, in our pro-death mentality, that we seem to, for whatever reason, favor death over life.

So we see that God wants us to be generous in bringing human life into this world and it is a gift from Him. But we might ask a question then. Did God say anything in particular about the use of unnatural means of birth control? Is there any mention in the Sacred Scripture? The answer is yes, there is. And once again we find it in the Book of Genesis, Ch 38. Now I need to give you a little background material before I read this account to you. In the Old Testament there was a particular law, which stated that if a man took a wife and then the man died before any children were born, that the brother of that man should take his wife, a widow, and bear children with her and that those children would then be attributed to the man who had died. That was the law in the Old Testament. In this particular case we see in chapter 38, a man named Er has taken a woman named Tamar as his wife and before they have any children, Er dies. And so, therefore, Judah, who is the father of Er says to his son Onan, that he must take Tamar to be his wife, and have children which must be attributed to Er. And then the story goes like this.

“Onan, however, knew that the descendants would not be counted as his, they would be counted as his brother Er’s. So whenever he had relations with his brother’s widow, Tamar, he wasted his seed on the ground to avoid contributing offspring for his brother.”

Notice that he wasted his seed on the ground. What he did greatly offended the Lord and the Lord took his life. As punishment for that sin, the unnatural act that Onan was committing, God took his life. God saw it as a serious moral evil and therefore in punishment for that sin, God took the life of Onan. And it is very interesting to know—I don’t think some of you might be aware of this—up until recently in the history of the Church, unnatural forms of birth control were called what? - acts of Onanism. Why? Because of this account right here in the Book of Genesis; this unnatural act of birth control practiced by Onan. The root for that word “Onanism” is found right here in this verse. It shows us clearly what God finds unfavorable—that God is strongly opposed to this particular act, this unnatural act of birth control.

Now in modern times, when the push is to contracept, certain scripture scholars have tried to reinterpret this passage saying that Onan was not punished by God for wasting his seed, but that he was punished because he was not open to his obligation to Tamar. However, as it is recorded in Deuteronomy 25, the punishment for not fulfilling the law is not death, but rather embarrassment in front of the community. So it shows us that God was attaching a special punishment to the sin of Onan, because that particular act was abominable in his sight. And of

course that has been the interpretation from the Church from the very beginning: that God is very displeased with unnatural forms of birth control.

We might ask ourselves, is there any reference to birth control in the New Testament? Some scripture scholars think that there is. In Revelation 21:8, God says this: “But as for cowards, the unfaithful, the depraved, murderers, the unchaste, sorcerers, idol worshippers, and deceivers of every sort, there lot is in the burning pool of fire and sulfur, which is the second death.” In other words God is telling us here that if we practice these things and don’t repent, that hell will be our lot for all eternity. Now if you were listening really closely there, of course you didn’t hear the word “contraception” or anything that sounded like it. Well, the word that could be used for “contraception” is the word “sorcery.” That’s because in the original Greek, the word that is used is “pharmacaea”, which sounds like our English word “pharmacy” or “pharmaceutical.” It is thought by some Scripture scholars that what’s being referred to here is the first century practice of contraception. You see, contraception goes way back. It is not just something from the 20th century. It goes all the way back to the time of Christ, even before. In those days women would concoct certain potions or certain herbs together, which they would drink, thinking that they would cause either a miscarriage or prevent conception. You see, that sort of thing was going on in those days and some Scripture scholars believe that this word “pharmacaea” or “sorcery”, is referring to that practice—the practice of concocting those potions to prevent conception or to cause an abortion. So it is thought by some that contraception is discussed even in the New Testament. The bottom line, my brothers and sisters, is that for 2000 years now the Catholic Church, and for 1930 years most Christian churches, have strongly condemned these particular acts, these unnatural forms of birth control. And that’s based, in part, on the testimony of God’s revelation found in the Sacred Scriptures.

Now there are many today in the Catholic Church that are militating for a change in this teaching, and I would say to them, “Don’t you believe as a Catholic, that the Holy Spirit guides the Church? After all, that is a fundamental belief of our faith, that Christ and His Spirit guide the Catholic Church. Well, do you think that the Holy Spirit made a mistake on this issue? Did the Holy Spirit not guide the Church for 2000 years? And all of a sudden we are going to say that while the Holy Spirit guides the Church, we were wrong before, and now the Holy Spirit has changed His mind? Does that make any sense or seem logical? No.” The Church, guided by the Holy Spirit, has taught the evil of these acts for 2000 years now and will continue to do so. And the reason is, of course, that God has taught us these things are morally wrong.” Now when I teach this to my students in my religion classes, right away the hands will go up and say, “Well, Father, does this mean that if I am going to be a good Catholic mother that I should try to have 25 children? Should I try to have as many children as I possibly can? Is that the teaching of the Church?” Well for the answer to that my brothers and sisters, you will have to wait for the next homily.

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Discussion Question:

- Discuss the relationship between the Gospel (Matthew 18:15-20) and Fr. Kopp’s focus on the competence of the Church in its teaching on contraception and openness to life.

The Church's Moral Teaching on Contraception, Part II

By
Father Anthony Kopp, O. Praem.

This is the second homily of a three-part series given by Fr. Anthony Kopp, O. Praem., recorded at St. Kilian Church, Mission Viejo, CA.

For a Catholic couple now, how many children are they called by God to bring into this world? I sort of left you with a facetious remark; is a Catholic couple called to bring into this world, let us say for example, 25 children in order to consider themselves a good, holy, Catholic couple? We are going to answer that question today. There will be no better way to answer that than to turn to the teaching of the Church herself, presented in the second Vatican Council 35 years ago. You may recall at that time, 1965, that the final document of the Council was *Gaudium et Spes*, (the “Church in the Modern World.”) There is a section in *Gaudium et Spes* on the question of human life—bringing children into this world. I thought it would be a good idea to answer that question by turning to that official teaching of our Church, especially to paragraph 50 and first we read there, the following:

Marriage and married love are by nature ordered to the procreation and education of children. Indeed children are the supreme gift of marriage and greatly contribute to the good of the parents themselves... Married couples should regard it as their proper mission to transmit human life and to educate their children. They should realize that they are thereby cooperating with the love of God, their creator.

Now, let me make a few comments about those sentences which I just read to you from *Gaudium et Spes*. First of all, the Church teaches us—and we saw last time, that this is exactly what God has revealed to us in His Holy Word—that marriage and married love are by nature ordered to bringing children into this world and educating them. Now from time to time when I have taught religion in the past, students have said to me, “Well Father, what if I want to get married, but I don’t want to have any children. We are going to, a priori, exclude children from our marriage.” Well, I say to them immediately, then you shouldn’t get married and you are not ready for marriage. Because the Church teaches us, as God teaches us, one of the primary ends or purposes of marriage is to bring children into this world. So obviously, to enter into marriage to exclude children is wrong. Also the Council teaches that children are not just *a* gift in marriage, but the *supreme* gift of marriage! I am sure you mothers and fathers have held your children in your arms, after they were born, and you realize this instinctively. The greatest gift of marriage is a new life, a child. When you hold that child, it is quite obvious that this is an expression of love of the couple and what a beautiful gift that is. We read there as well, that children contribute greatly to the good of the parents.

I have two sisters who have children and of course my brothers-in-law as well, and I can see quite clearly, in the past years since they have been married, that they have changed by having children. It does change the couple for the better. Because obviously if you have children you need to grow in love, especially in sacrificial love. You need to sacrifice yourself for your children and of course you need to grow in patience and in other virtues as well. And so bringing children into the world does the couple so much good, especially spiritual good. We read also that the couple has the privilege of cooperating with the love of God, the Creator. As you know, God does not drop down people from heaven. The couple needs to cooperate with God in bringing new life into this world. God will not do it on His own. A husband and wife must cooperate with God, the Creator, in bringing a child into this world. Just think then how close the

married couple is to God, the Creator. What a tremendous gift that is, to work so closely with God.

Now, that still doesn't answer the question then, what does God expect with regard to bringing children into this world? How many does He expect? Well the first thing we have to keep in mind is what the Council tells us at the end of this section, where we read, "Among the married couples who thus fulfill their God given mission of bringing children into the world, special mention should be made of those who after prudent reflection and common decision, courageously, undertake the proper upbringing of a large number of children." In other words the Church is teaching us that those Catholic couples who are generous and courageous in bringing into this world a large number of children, are to be especially commended. You know of course historically, through the past 30-40 years, large Catholic families were pretty common. It doesn't seem to be quite as common today. I grew up in a family of 5 children, which I guess today, would be considered to be a large family. To be quite honest with you, when my sister Anne and David, my brother, came along I would occasionally complain to my parents and say, "Why did you have to have so many children?" Because we were poor; we didn't have very much money or anything. Why did we have to have so many children? From a selfish perspective, I thought we would have been much better off if we had fewer kids, so we could have nicer things, like a new car or a color T.V., or whatever. Well, looking at it 20-30 years later, I realize that it was a blessing growing up with such a family, a large family of 5 children. Because ultimately, of course, the people you can depend upon in life are your family members. What a blessing it is for me to have three sisters and a brother that I can, to a certain degree, share my life with! What a blessing that is, to grow up in a large family! The Church is telling us that married couples that are courageous and generous bringing into life a large family are to be commended.

But you did notice in those sentences the words spoken by the Church which say that this should be done after *prudent reflection and common decision*? In other words, the decision is made by the husband and wife. Earlier on, the Church teaches that it is the married couple themselves who must in the last analysis arrive at these judgments before God. It is the husband and wife before God, together who must make the decision about how wholly they are going to cooperate with God about bringing life into this world. I, as a priest, or any priest, or bishop, or even the Pope, cannot tell you, that you must have 5 children. No, it is your decision, husband and wife, before God, in consultation with God, in prayer before God, asking him, "Lord how many children do you want me to bring into this world?" That is the first thing to keep in mind. It is the common decision of the husband and wife before God. Also the Church says after prudent reflection, certain factors must be taken into consideration in coming to this decision. Some of those factors are listed as well by the Church. It involves the consideration of their own good and the good of their children already born or yet to come, the ability to read the signs of the times and their own situation on the material and spiritual level, and finally the estimation of the good of the family and society and of the Church. In other words the couple in making this decision before God in prayer should keep special factors in mind in coming to the decision.

There are several legitimate reasons for putting off having children or coming to an end to bringing children into this world. What are those legitimate reasons? Well, there are three possibilities. The first is this—we could call it financial: if a married couple is in a situation where they have no money, or no home, they may be wise and prudent in putting off having children. I know an example of a married couple who decided to put off having children for a year and-a-half. The reason they did so, is because the husband, at the time, was not making any money. He was doing an internship and the only person making any money in the family was the wife. So it was prudent of them to put off having children until the husband would begin a job in which he was making money. So there is the financial reason. The second reason for putting off having children would be the reason of genetics. In other words, if it was a pretty certain fact that

a child to be born would be born with a serious birth defect, not a hangnail, but something serious, this could be a legitimate reason for putting off having children. Then finally, there would be a third reason, which is health. If it has been, once again, pretty certainly determined that a woman's health would be in danger by having another child, this could also be a legitimate reason for putting off having children, or having no more children in that person's lifetime. These are obviously serious reasons.

A couple must always keep in mind what the Church teaches as well, that married people should realize that in their behavior, they must not simply follow their own fancy. They must be ruled by conscience and conscience must be formed to the law of God, in the light of the teaching authority of the Church, which is the authentic interpreter of the Divine Law. So in coming to this decision, as husband and wife, before God, the couple must keep in mind the teaching of the Church. The Church is the interpreter of God's law. I am afraid today, that there are many married couples inside the Church who have forgotten that part. In making this decision to be open about human life, you must keep in mind the teaching of God's Church. The failure to do so, of course, is the failure to hear the Voice of God.

Now what is the advantage, then, of doing all this? The final sentence from *Gaudium et Spes*: "Whenever Christian spouses in a spirit of sacrifice and trust in Divine Providence carry out their duties of procreation with generous human and Christian responsibility, they glorify the Creator and perfect themselves in Christ." You become holy and closer to being a saint, when you fulfill these responsibilities in a spirit of sacrifice and trust in Divine Providence. Now, brothers and sisters, that leaves ultimately this question: If we are to be, as a married couple, generous in bringing human life into the world, and if there are certain circumstances in which we legitimately are able to put off having children what is the appropriate means? What is the legitimate and moral means with which we are to do that? Once again, that will be answered in the next homily.

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Discussion Question:

- Discuss the relationship between the Gospel reading (Matthew 20:1-16) and Fr. Kopp's focus on openness to new life and family size.

The Church's Moral Teaching on Contraception, Part III

By
Father Anthony Kopp, O. Praem.

This is the third homily of a three-part series given by Fr. Anthony Kopp, O. Praem., recorded at St. Kilian Church, Mission Viejo, CA.

My brothers and sisters, you may recall 2 weeks ago where we left off in our little series here on the issue of contraception. Today will be the third and final part of that series, and it is appropriate because today is “Respect Life” Sunday. As I am going to point out at the end of today’s homily, it is appropriate because this issue is very much tied in with our modern day problem with respect, or lack thereof, for human life. The last time I left you with this question: “If a couple, before God, decides that it is appropriate to put off having children, what is the moral means, the good means for doing so?” How does a Catholic couple do that? The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches us exactly how to go about doing so. In paragraph 2370 of the Catechism you read this: “Periodic continence, that is, the methods of birth regulation based on self-observation and the use of infertile periods is in conformity with the objective criteria of morality.” The Catholic Church teaches us, and has always taught us, that the Catholic couple is to practice Natural Family Planning, the natural means, respecting God’s order of things for spacing children. This is what the Church teaches us, in other words, to practice in marriage periodic abstinence or continence. Now that is not some new idea, something the Church just came up with recently that is arbitrarily imposed on married couples today. It is something you find in Sacred Scriptures. If you read the Book of Leviticus, chapter 15, it was commanded by God, in the Old Testament, for married couples to practice periodic abstinence.

Also, St. Paul in the first letter to the Corinthians says that a married couple should practice abstinence from time to time for the purpose of strengthening their prayer life. They should go apart for a time, strengthen that life, and then come back together. Now, what is the value of practicing Natural Family Planning? Well, the Catechism, in the next sentence, mentions several values. The first value is that these methods respect the bodies of the spouses, encourage tenderness between them, and favor the education of an authentic freedom. Now, I have talked to several married couples, both in my own family and outside of my own family. I have come up with a list of benefits, which they have related to me.

First of all, and I think most importantly, the practice of Natural Family Planning increases the amount, if you want to put it in those terms, of sacrificial love between the couple. Obviously if you are going to practice this method of Natural Family Planning, it requires sacrifice on the part of the couple. That sacrifice will be a result of, and will strengthen, the love found in that couple. Secondly, it strengthens or deepens the level of communication between the couple. Obviously, affection must be expressed in different ways. A couple practicing Natural Family Planning learns to do that. Finally, couples have noted to me, and this goes along with the idea of an increase of sacrificial love, that the practice of this method roots out, or tends to destroy selfishness (self-centeredness) in the marriage. If you have to sacrifice yourself for the good of your spouse when practicing this method, it helps you become less selfish.

We see at the societal level that this is the case. Studies have shown that for couples who practice Natural Family Planning, the divorce rate is less than 3%. Now my brothers and sisters, what is the divorce rate at the societal level, our society, which heavily promotes the use of contraception? It is over 50%! I can’t help but wonder if we Catholics aren’t on to something, that there isn’t a great blessing in using this particular method. Now, in contrast, the Church has

the following to say about contraception. In contrast, “every action, which whether in anticipation of the conjugal act, or in its accomplishment or in the development of its natural consequences, proposes whether as an end or as a means to render procreation impossible, is intrinsically evil.” In other words, such acts are evil in themselves. So what’s the Church talking about here? Well, the Church is talking about artificial contraceptives, sterilization, and of course, abortion. All of these things are intrinsic evils.

Another thing that is really important to know, my brothers and sisters, is that many of the contraceptives that are on the market today have tremendous side effects. When I first came into possession of the instruction sheet that goes along with the use of the pill, I opened it and first of all, it’s huge! And secondly, I was struck by the fact there was a whole column there that had possible side effects that a woman could endure by taking the Pill. I was thinking to myself, that if I was a husband and I loved my wife, would I want her to take anything like that, which could cause possible damage to her? Is that love, to put your spouse at risk like that in using such devices? I don’t think so. Another thing we need to keep in mind with regard to contraceptives is that there are evil side effects. Many things about contraceptives today are not talked about. Many of these contraceptives today are abortifacients—they cause abortions. Women are often not aware of this fact. Many contraceptives fail to prevent conception, in which case they prevent the embryo from growing inside the woman’s body. Abortion is caused after conception, and the woman is not aware of that fact.

You know, statistics in our country say that there are 1.4 million abortions a year. Well, the number is actually greater than that, hugely greater than that, because of all the abortions that are caused by abortifacient contraceptives. Now, when this is presented to people, namely that we are to use Natural Family Planning, and to shun contraceptives because they are intrinsically evil, or morally evil, right away people will say, “What’s the difference? After all, the goal is the same—to put off having children. What’s the difference?” Well, in answering that question, we need to keep in mind this: that the ends do not justify the means. That is a fundamental tenet of moral theology.

St. Paul also teaches this in his letter to the Romans. Just because I have a good end, doesn’t mean that I can use any means to achieve it. Let’s use a little example here. Yesterday, the football team of my school traveled to another school to play football. The other school was apparently much faster than we were, and so by half time we were down 28-7. Our coach could have said to our guys at half time, “Well, the goal is of course to win this game. Now, how are we going to do it? Well, we could, on the one hand, after half time, go and play our hardest. Or, we could, in the second half, injure the other team’s players. That is a different means. We could, for example, get out our little files and sharpen our helmet buckles till they become razor sharp so the other team’s players would be injured when we hit them.” Now, that is pretty extreme. That did happen, by the way, last year in a football game in Texas. That’s a different means. We see that those means are not equal. The end is the same. It is good to win the football game, but the means are not the same. One means is good, which is playing harder, which our guys did. We didn’t win, but we came closer. Or, one uses the means of trying to injure the other team. That’s evil. And that’s the difference.

One means, Natural Family Planning, respects God’s Order of things, respects the fertility and infertility of the married couple, has respect for the nature of the marital or conjugal act, which is good. Contraception does not. Contraception attempts to divide what God has joined together, namely the unitive aspect of marriage and the procreative aspect of the marital act. Those two are to be together, as our Holy Father himself in his encyclical, *Familiaris Consortio*, points out. He says this: “Thus the innate language that expresses the total reciprocal self-giving of husband and wife is overlaid through contraception by an objectively contradictory language, namely that of

not giving oneself totally to the other. This leads not only to a positive refusal to be open to life, but also to a falsification of the inner truth of conjugal love, which is called upon to give itself a personal totality.” In other words, the Holy Father is saying that by practicing contraception in marriage, the married couple is saying to each other, “You know I’m not really giving myself totally to you in this particular marital act.”

Now when I first began this series about 4 or 5 weeks ago, I said that in my opinion, there is no greater evil in our society today, or in our Church, than the widespread use of contraceptives. Now why did I make this statement? Well, I could talk about this subject for hours. You probably don’t want me to, so I am going to give a couple of illustrations. First of all, we see that contraceptives, or widespread use of contraception, leads to abortion. There is no question about that. We see that in every nation in the Western World, where contraception has been introduced, abortion has quickly followed. The same is true in the United States. In 1965, our Supreme Court in the case *Griswold v. Connecticut*, struck down all remaining laws on the books against the sale, possession and use of contraceptives. In that case, the basis for making the decision was the Supreme Court’s finding in the Bill of Rights, of the so-called “right to privacy.” Now where have we heard that before? Well, that language was used again in 1973 in *Roe v. Wade*. The so-called “right to privacy” which is nowhere found in our Constitution or in the Bill of Rights, but was invented by the Supreme Court to open the door to the use of contraceptives, then to abortion. Obviously, the use of contraception separates the marital act from its true end, namely procreation. When that happens, of course, the marital act becomes open to the use of anything that the parties involved want it to be used for. If then, the marital act is separated from procreation, what happens when procreation happens anyway? In that case, abortion is needed to eliminate the consequences. That is exactly what has happened in our society.

Secondly, contraception is a great evil because it has definitely weakened the Catholic Church in the United States. It has resulted in the breakdown of *authority*. Now this is very important because the Catholic faith is based on authority. First and foremost it is based on the authority of God’s Word. We receive God’s Word and must accept it and live according to it. To reject it is to make oneself no longer a follower of Jesus Christ. Our faith is based on the authority of God’s Word. Secondly, it is based on the authority of Christ’s Church that faithfully transmits and interprets for us God’s word. To reject the authority of the Church is to reject the authority of Christ. It was in 1968, as I mentioned before, that the rejection of *Humanae Vitae* (which reiterated the Church’s perpetual teaching on the issue of contraception) marked the first time many Catholics began to reject the teaching authority of the Church, thus rejecting the teaching authority of Christ. Obviously this has greatly weakened the Church. To no longer accept the authority of the Church is to no longer accept the authority of God.

What other evils have we seen since 1968? Well, I can’t help but notice that Sunday Mass attendance has plummeted to a fraction of what it was just forty years ago. Well, obviously, if the Church doesn’t have the authority to teach me in the area of contraception, then the Church doesn’t have the authority to teach me to go to Mass on Sunday. I am free to choose whether to go or not. Many people have made that choice. I have also noticed, as a priest, that there has been a tremendous, even more significant than reduced Mass attendance, plummeting in the use of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Once again that follows. If the Church doesn’t have the authority to teach me in one area, then the Church can’t tell me I need a priest to go to Confession. I can go to God; I am autonomous now and I make my own decision. I can go to God directly to have my sins forgiven. And, after all, if we are a married couple, using contraception, why would we go to Confession? I would be admitting that I am doing something that is contrary to the teaching of the Church, that the Church considers wrong. Why would I go to Confession and confess my sins? For many other moral issues as well, on which the Church teaches, we have seen the erosion of obedience. If the Church doesn’t have the authority to teach

me in one area, why should I follow the teaching in any area? Why can't I just decide for myself about anything that the Church might want to teach me?

Finally, I notice as a priest and an educator, that contraception is the root of why so many young people know so very little about our Catholic faith. The faith is not being passed on. Because, after all, once again, if you're a contracepting married couple, why would you teach your children the fullness of the Catholic faith, which is based on the authority of the Church that teaches us. Why would you do it? I am afraid that maybe with some religious educators teaching in our schools and religious education programs, the same thing is happening. Why would you teach the fullness of the Catholic faith if you don't accept it yourself? That's why I am afraid that in many programs, faith has been watered down. Fullness is not given. Because maybe they are embarrassed about the fullness of that faith and therefore a lot of times, sadly, they are occupied with doing art projects and the like while the fullness of the faith is not being passed on.

So, my brothers and sisters, as we come to the conclusion of all this, I think we really need in our society, especially in our Church, repentance, a change of heart. We desperately need that, a change of heart on this most important moral issue. All throughout the Old Testament God tells us that blessings will be bestowed upon those who follow God's law. That's so obvious in this issue. With the married couples that I've talked to who practice Natural Family Planning and respect the teaching of the Church, there are blessings, great blessings. On the other hand, God warns us in the Old Testament frequently, that to disobey His law is to draw upon ourselves curses. We see that in our society today. So my brothers and sisters, as Catholics, as leaven in the dough, we need a change of heart, repentance in this area. We would do well to heed the words of our Lord at the end of today's Gospel. It's a warning for us, if we don't change our hearts and our minds, on this issue. He says, "Therefore I say to you the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that will produce His fruits."

May that not happen to us because of our resistance to God's word, to God's will in this area. My brothers and sisters, let us pray for a change of heart for Catholics in our world, a change of heart on this issue, a sense of repentance and openness to God's word, so that we might draw down upon us once again as a nation and as a Church, the blessings of God.

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Discussion Questions:

- (1) What relation has Respect Life Sunday to the issue of contraception?
- (2) Why might it be the case, as Fr. Kopp argues, that "contraception is the root of why so many young people know so very little about our Catholic faith"?

Anti-life Message Finds a Home in Contraception

By

Most Reverend Paul S. Loverde, D.D., S.T.L., J.C.L.

Bishop of Arlington, Virginia

“John is his name!” (Lk 1:63). These words of Zechariah, announced a few minutes ago in the gospel, identify for us the very special solemnity that we celebrate today, the birthday of Saint John the Baptist. There are only three times in the Church calendar that we celebrate the births of holy people: Christmas, the birth of Christ; September 8, the birth of the Blessed Mother; and today, the birth of John the Baptist. For the remainder of the “festival of saints,” we celebrate their entrance into heaven, their birth into eternal life.

How appropriate it is for us today to also celebrate the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, asking that all abortions cease and be no more. For John the Baptist brought a message of life into the world. We read in the responsorial Psalm, “I praise you for I am wonderfully made” (Ps 139:14a). In the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* we read about how we were “wonderfully made”: “‘Being man’ or ‘being woman’ is a reality which is good and willed by God: man and woman possess an inalienable dignity which comes to them immediately from God their Creator (cf. Gen 2:7,22). Man and woman are both with one and the same dignity ‘in the image of God.’ In their ‘being-man’ and ‘being-woman,’ they reflect the Creator’s wisdom and goodness” (CCC 369). The prophet Isaiah, in the first reading, speaks of the Lord “who formed me as his servant from the womb” (Is 49:5).

Life is always created by God, not by man. Thus, it cannot be destroyed by man. Although a human person cannot fully reflect the complete glory of God, people can reveal part of that glory when they behave as images of God. We are made in God’s image; we are to reflect God to others. How can we best image God? We can love as God loves. St. Cyprian said it another way, “When we call God our Father we ought also to act like sons...We should live like the temples of God we are, so that it can be seen that God lives in us” (*Office of Readings; Tuesday, 11th Week of Ordinary Time*).

Abortion results from a failure to love as Christ loves. Abortion has taken a traumatic toll on the lives of so many in this country because of a misconstrued idea of love, a self-gratifying love born out of selfishness, and not a sacrificial love, born out of complete self-donation. Additionally, often we hear that by using proper contraception, one can avoid pregnancy and thus reduce the number of abortions in our country. Our Holy Father speaks of the fallacy of this argument in the *Gospel of Life*. He says, “The Catholic Church is...accused of actually promoting abortion, because she obstinately continues to teach the moral unlawfulness of contraception.” When looked at carefully, “This objection is clearly unfounded.” “Certainly,” he goes on to say, “from the moral point of view contraception and abortion are *specifically different* evils: the former contradicts the full truth of the sexual act as the proper expression of conjugal love, while the latter destroys the life of a human being; the former is opposed to the virtue of chastity in marriage, the latter is opposed to the virtue of justice and directly violates the divine commandment, ‘You shall not kill.’ But despite their differences of nature and moral gravity, contraception and abortion are often closely connected as fruits of the same tree” (13).

The contraceptive behavior, whereby one portrays a false love without being open to life, is inherently flawed. This anti-life attitude, which was fostered by Margaret Sanger when she

founded the National Birth Control League (the predecessor of Planned Parenthood)¹ around 1914, promoted the belief that unlimited sexual pleasure without regarding whom the partner is or without worrying about bringing children into the world would “build marital happiness and stability.”² Oh how that logic is flawed. Look at the divorce statistics in our country today! Look at the rise in child abuse, and in spousal abuse. “Woman and child abuse has multiplied 14 times since abortion became legal.”³ Yes, the anti-life message does not find its home only with abortion, but also with a contraceptive behavior, for as the Holy Father says in the Gospel of Life, they are “fruits of the same tree” (13). This anti-child attitude which draws people toward using contraceptives or abortifacients to prevent children, is the same attitude which leads to abortion when the methods fail.

But how does one act in a moral way in today’s society? Let me offer some basic suggestions:

- (1) The marital act has always been just that, reserved for the state of matrimony. The marital act outside of marriage “destroys the very idea of the family; [and] weakens the sense of fidelity” (CCC 2390). The marital act must be reserved for marriage.
- (2) Children are a basic gift of marriage to be welcomed, not to be protected against. When a couple has “just reasons” to postpone the births of children, they should not come together during the fertile time. Thus, the couple manifests the true meaning of love, the giving of oneself for the good of the other, by practicing “the virtue of married chastity...with sincerity of heart” (CCC 2368).
- (3) Married and engaged couples should learn the fertility awareness found in Natural Family Planning so that they make decisions on family size based upon knowledge of the wife’s fertility and their own ability to be responsible parents for all of their children. Natural Family Planning classes are taught throughout the diocese, including here at Blessed Sacrament Parish.

Today we celebrate the Birth of Saint John the Baptist. As we continue the Eucharistic Sacrifice, let us be reminded also of the Baptist’s death—a death which came about due to his defense of marriage. “Recall that Herod had had John arrested, put in chains, and imprisoned on account of Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip. That was because John had told him, ‘It is not right for you to live with her’” (Mt 14:3-4). We all know the rest of the story of how Herodias’ daughter was granted her wish from Herod to have the head of John the Baptist on a platter (Mt 14:6-11).

John the Baptist’s life and death are centered on the celebration of life itself. As a prophet, he made clear the path for the Lord, announcing the good news of salvation—our salvation—our life after death—in the person of Christ Jesus. As the Opening Prayer puts it, he was raised up “to prepare a perfect people for Christ the Lord.” In his death, he continued to show the way to eternal life by teaching moral right and wrong in marriage.

So let us learn from the experience of St. John. Let us proclaim the good news of the gospel when it’s easy and when it’s difficult; when it is politically correct and when it is not; in season and out of season (2 Tim 34:1). May the courage of St. John the Baptist be with us as we continue to preach and to live the Gospel of Life!

Discussion Question:

- What connection does the feast of the birthday of John the Baptist have to the issue of contraception and abortion?

¹ Kippley, *Sex and the Marriage Covenant*, 226.

² Ibid., 277.

³ Nykiel, *No One Told Me I Could Cry*, 14.

Love Means Giving Oneself Away

By

Most Reverend Thomas J. Olmstead

Bishop of Wichita, Kansas

20 January 2001

God created us in love; God created us out of love; God created us for love. God gave us two great commandments: “You shall love your God with all your mind, with all your heart, with all your strength and with all your soul. You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Love, then, is our origin, our destiny, our calling. If I do not love, if I do not experience love, my life remains an enigma to me and empty of meaning. Love alone makes life worthwhile.

That is why St. Paul writes: “If I speak in human and angelic tongues but do not have love, I am a resounding gong or a clashing cymbal. And if I have the gift of prophecy and comprehend all mysteries and all knowledge; If I have all faith so as to move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away everything I own, and I hand my body over so that I may boast but do not have love, I gain nothing”(1 Cor 13:1-3).

Thus, when we think of human dignity and the right to life of every human person, we begin by thinking of love. When we remember with sadness and abhorrence the infamous U.S. Supreme Court decision *Roe v. Wade*, which occurred 28 years ago, and when we try to understand our responsibility as individuals and as followers of Jesus for overturning that calamitous legal decision, we begin by focusing our attention on love. For love is our origin and our calling, our destiny and our hope. And while everything else in this world may pass away, love will not. Love, while tender; is strong. Love never fails (1 Cor 13:4-13).

But what is love? What does love look like? What is the difference between authentic love and its counterfeit? Fundamentally, we learn what love is from God, from the love of the three Persons of the Blessed Trinity; namely that love entails the giving and receiving of persons. “God so loved the world that he gave His only begotten Son.” To love is to make oneself a gift for others and to receive others as a gift.

This is what *Christmas* is all about: God gave Himself to us. He made Himself a gift to us in the most human of terms. “The Word became flesh.” He became a tiny child in the womb of the Virgin Mary.

This is what *Good Friday* is all about: God gave Himself to us, as an innocent victim on the Cross. He died so that we might live. He gave Himself over to death so that we might be saved from death.

This is what the *Last Supper* is about: God made Himself a gift for us, under the forms of bread and wine. Jesus took bread, broke it and gave it to His disciples, saying: “This is my Body.” Some of you in the pro-life movement may be familiar with Fr. Frank Pavone, founder of a movement called Priests for Life. In a recent article, he asked the question: “Did you ever realize that the same four words that were used by the Lord Jesus to save the world are also used by some to promote abortion? ‘This is my body.’ The same simple words are spoken from opposite

ends of the universe, with meanings that are directly contrary to each other.”

When Jesus spoke those words, He was pointing to Calvary, to what He would do with His body for the sake of others, how He would make His body a sacrifice so that we might have life. Moreover, He so completely makes Himself a gift for us that He invites us to share in His very life. He makes us members of His body; an awesome mystery of perfect love. Paradoxically, a person supporting abortion uses the same words to say the exact opposite: “This is my body. Don’t tell me what to do with it! It’s mine, and I can do whatever I want with it, even kill the life within it.”

The same words can yield opposite results. Christ gives away His body so that we might have life and have it abundantly (cf. John 10:10). Abortion supporters hold tightly to their own bodies so that others might die. In giving His Body to us, Christ teaches the meaning of love: He says, “I sacrifice myself for the good of the other person.” Abortion teaches the opposite of love: It says, “I sacrifice the other person for the good of myself” (Fr. Frank Pavone).

It is true for you and me to say, “This is my body,” but why? Why is this body mine? Why did God give us that freedom and responsibility? So that we can do as Jesus did, so that we can obey Jesus’ command at the Last Supper: “Do this in memory of me.”

On the day you and I were born, our dad and mom said, “This is my body, given for you.” They did not say, “This is my body, don’t get in my way” This is the vocation and mission of parents. It is the way that we reverse *Roe v. Wade*. A Culture of Life is built up one child at a time, with men and women saying with Jesus, out of love for their spouse and out of love for each child God gives, “This is my body. As God has given my life to me, so I give it as a gift to you.” Thus love consists in making oneself a gift for others.

There is one additional part of love, which follows naturally from its deepest meaning; namely, that love also means *gratefully receiving*. In fact, on the existential, human level, this is the most affirming part of love. This is what the Virgin Mary did, when she said to God, “Fiat, let it be done to me according to your word.” She gratefully received into her body the gift of God’s self; the Son of God became the son of Mary.

This is what Zechariah and Elizabeth did for John the Baptist; they gratefully received him as a gift from God. This is what husbands and wives do for each other, and why marriage is a sign of the love of Christ for His Church. This is what parents do for their children. Even prior to making their bodies a gift for their children, they receive with joy the gift of a child that comes from God.

Abortion is refusing to receive the child within as a gift. Not only is it not grateful for the gift of another human person, but abortion distorts the truth of the whole matter. Language gets twisted around; responsibility for others gets cast aside. Instead of being called a child, the unborn is called an aggressor or mere human tissue or some other such dehumanizing term. The refusal to see other persons as gifts of God, the choice to see them as unwanted burdens or intruders into privacy, is clear evidence of a Culture of Death.

Contraception follows this same false logic. For it refuses to receive one’s spouse as a gift in his or her whole self. It says, “I will only receive you if you are not fertile.” Not infrequently, it is said that there would be very few abortions if contraceptives were made easily available to all. Quite the opposite has proven to be true. In country after country, abortion only becomes

widespread shortly after contraceptives are introduced into society. What follows legalized contraception is the development of a contraceptive mentality in which children are regarded as an obstacle to personal fulfillment. Any life that results from a sexual encounter which was supposed to be guarded from fertility by the Pill or other means thus becomes an enemy to be avoided at all costs. Abortion becomes the solution to failed contraception.

It is the love of God for the world that gives us cause to rejoice, that undergirds our hope. It is this love of God that forms the foundation of the dignity of every human being. From the very moment of conception, we are, each and everyone, created by God in love, and we are redeemed by the sacrifice of His Son. To each of us He says, “This is my body, given for you.”

Let us rejoice in the love of God that is stronger than sin and more powerful than death. The love of the living Christ will never fail. Heaven and earth will pass away. *Roe v. Wade* will pass away; it is just a matter of time. But love will never pass away. The victory of Christ’s love has already begun. His mercy works through us to build a culture of life and a civilization of love.

Discussion Questions:

- (1) Discuss the relationship between the Gospel reading (John 1:29-34) and Bishop Olmsted’s focus on selfless love as the key to overcoming the Culture of Death.

- (2) Bishop Olmsted makes the point that *Roe v. Wade* is reversed by our offering of self to others and that a “Culture of Life is built up one child at a time.” Expand on these two points. In what practical ways can they be realized?

Mass Commemorating the 30th Anniversary of *Humanae Vitae*

By

Most Reverend Justin Rigali, J.C.D., Archbishop of Saint Louis

Sunday, June 28, 1998

Gratitude for Embracing and Living the Message of *Humanae Vitae*

I wish to begin my homily this afternoon by expressing a word of gratitude to each of you. I am grateful for your desire to gather in anticipation of the thirtieth anniversary, this July 25th, of Pope Paul VI's Letter *Humanae Vitae*. I thank you not only for commemorating this anniversary, but for your dedication in living the teaching of *Humanae Vitae* in your family life.

I am grateful to *the doctors* who against enormous pressure by many of their peers have been faithful in their medical practice to the Church's vision of marriage and family. I thank those of you who for many years have led the efforts within the Archdiocese to proclaim the truth of the vision of life and love presented in *Humanae Vitae* and who have made available to couples within the Archdiocese the practical instruction to assist them in living marital chastity.

Most of all, I am grateful to all you couples present today who have embraced the teaching of *Humanae Vitae* and have incorporated this teaching into your married life. I commend you for your courage and fidelity to the vision of Christian marriage as expressed in *Humanae Vitae*, despite all the efforts to make you succumb to what can be described as a "contraceptive mentality," which is so pervasive in our culture.

Discipleship Is Never Easy, Never without Costs

Our readings for today's Mass remind us that *it has never been easy to follow the Lord*. Jesus was very honest about the hardships that would be required of those who accepted His call to discipleship: 'The foxes have lairs, the birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head' (Mt 8:20).

The Gospel also illustrates *the temptation to delay the commitment to discipleship*. There seem always to be "good" reasons for delaying our acceptance of the call of Jesus to come and follow Him. It is never difficult to develop excuses why now is not an opportune moment to surrender ourselves completely to the challenge of Christian discipleship.

Certainly, in the current cultural climate a married couple is barraged with numerous "reasons" why not to accept the full teaching of the Church with all its practical implications regarding the meaning and purposes of Christian married love.

The Catechism's Reaffirmation of *Humanae Vitae*

An essential element of the Church's teaching pertains to *the fecundity of marriage*. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, drawing on the formulations within *Humanae Vitae*, expresses the Church's teaching in this fashion:

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

The *Catechism* elaborates on the practical implications of this inseparable connection between the unitive and procreative dimension of the marital act in this fashion:

A particular aspect of this responsibility concerns the *regulation of births*. For just reasons, spouses may wish to space the births of their children. It is their duty to make certain that their desire is not motivated out of selfishness but is in conformity with generosity appropriate to responsible parenthood. Moreover, they should conform their behavior to the objective criteria of morality...” (2368).

The *Catechism* goes on to specify what conforms to this objective criteria of morality:

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

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* restates what was contained in *Humanae Vitae*. In fact, each of the citations from the *Catechism* that I have just read relies greatly on the formulations on these matters found in *Humanae Vitae*.

The Critics of *Humanae Vitae* Misread the Consequences of Contraception

Pope Paul VI anticipated that the teaching of *Humanae Vitae* would not be easily received. Pope Paul VI acknowledged that the Church is not surprised to be, like Jesus Himself, *a sign of contradiction*. Pope Paul VI concluded that the Church has no alternative but with humble firmness to teach faithfully the entire moral law of which she is neither the author nor arbiter.

At the time of the promulgation of *Humanae Vitae*, there was intense opposition to its message. Those who argued that the Church should change her teaching on artificial contraception claimed that the widespread use of artificial contraception would strengthen Christian marriages, eliminate the problem of teen pregnancy, and diminish the perceived need for abortion and thus dramatically reduce the number of abortions.

Paul VI, on the other hand, argued that some of *the consequences of artificial contraception* would be increased occurrences of “conjugal infidelity and a general lowering of morality.” As the utilization of artificial contraception has become more and more prevalent in the United States, our divorce rate has soared. Teen pregnancy has reached what some have termed epidemic proportions. The efforts to legalize abortion intensified after the promulgation of *Humanae Vitae* and with its legalization the number of abortions has skyrocketed.

Pope Paul VI in *Humanae Vitae* cautioned that once artificial contraception gained popular acceptance some governments would begin to impose contraception on their people. President

Clinton's visit to China serves to remind us of the coercive nature of China's population policy that not only imposes contraception but also abortion.

Disrupting "the Ecology of Human Sexuality" Leads to Enslavement, Not Freedom

Paul VI was able to see clearly that once the "ecology" of the marital act was disturbed there would inevitably be dire consequences for the individual as well as for society itself. Paul VI recognized the inherent dangers of upsetting the balance that God had created in linking the sexual expression of human love with the awesome power to participate in the creation of new human life. Once *the connection between the expression of love and the power to transmit life* was severed, the trivialization of human sexuality, the devaluation of marriage and the loss of respect for human life were inevitable.

The acceptance of artificial contraception was the foundation for what would be termed "the sexual revolution." This revolution claimed to liberate. Yet, the "freedom" it offered was not *true freedom anchored in truth*, but a "freedom," as Saint Paul describes in our second reading today, "*that gives free rein to the flesh*" (cf. Gal 5:13-25). This "freedom" is indeed no freedom at all, but a new enslavement to an old master – lust and its destructive and uncontrolled cravings. Those who have eyes that desire to see can recognize clearly the truth of Pope Paul VI's insights as expressed in *Humanae Vitae* as well as the wisdom of the ancient truths upon which they were based.

The Antidote to the Contraceptive Culture Is True Christian Marriages Lived with Joy

What is the faithful Christian to do in a world that in so many ways has embraced values directly contrary to the moral law and the Gospel of Jesus Christ? Like the instruction in today's Gospel given by Jesus to the disciples who wanted to call down fire to destroy the Samaritans because they did not welcome them, we know that Jesus does not want us to respond harshly and violently to a world that is often quite hostile to the Christian understanding of human sexuality, marriage, and family (cf. Lk 9:54).

Rather, Jesus calls us as a Church to do precisely what so many of you in this Church have been doing for many years, namely to give unequivocal witness to the truth by *joyfully and faithfully living the vision of Christian marriage and family* as articulated in *Humanae Vitae* and reiterated in the *Catechism*.

Pope Paul VI in *Humanae Vitae* acknowledged that it is to married couples that the Lord entrusts the task of showing others the holiness of "the law which unites the mutual love of husband and wife with their cooperation with the love of God, the Author of human life." The Pope noted that married couples "become apostles and guides to other married couples" inspiring one another to embrace fully *the challenge of Christian marriage with all its hopes, anxieties and joys*.

Gratitude for Celebrating Love and Life in Daily Family Life

I conclude where I began, by thanking you for your efforts to understand and accept in its fullness the Church's teaching on Christian married life. Thank you for your courage, your fidelity, your generosity, your joy as you follow the example of the selfless love of Jesus in living your marital commitments of love, in accepting the awesome gift and challenges of Christian parenthood, and in discovering together what a gift you give to each other.

Thank you not only for “celebrating love and life” today, but for “celebrating love and life” each and every day in the manner in which you engage in the struggles and joys of Christian marriage, of Christian parenting, of Christian family life.

In this Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, through Christ and in the Holy Spirit, together we give thanks to the Father for the strength and grace that He has already infused into your hearts. And may you continue to be strengthened by the words that Jesus spoke to those who believed in Him: “If you live according to my teaching, you are truly my disciples; then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free...That is why, if the Son frees you, you will really be free” (Jn 8:31-32, 36). Amen.

Discussion Question:

- Discuss the relationship between the readings for this Mass (Gal:1, 13-18, and Luke 9:51-62) and Bishop Rigali’s focus on achieving freedom through obedience to God’s vision of Christian marriage and family.

Perceiving the Contraception Connection

By
Father Raymond Suriani
Saint Pius X Church, Westerly, Rhode Island

This homily (slightly abridged) was given on January 17, 1999 at the Cathedral of SS. Peter and Paul, Providence, RI.

As he stood on one of the banks of the Jordan River that day, he was surrounded by many people: people from Jerusalem, people from the countryside of Judea, they came to him in huge numbers. Of course, that was not unusual. In fact, Scripture indicates that it was always that way for John the Baptist. He truly was a charismatic personality, a man who could draw a crowd and then hold them spellbound by his teaching and preaching because he spoke the truth with such clarity and conviction. We're told that even some of those who hated him, like King Herod, were "captivated by his words."

So there he is, in the midst of this vast sea of humanity, ministering as he always did to hundreds of hungry souls, and he suddenly catches sight of someone coming toward him. Now please keep in mind that everyone else who was there that day saw this same individual making his way toward John. But to them, he was simply a young Galilean man, about 30 years of age; if they knew his family they would have said, "Oh yes, that's the son of Joseph, the carpenter from Nazareth."

In other words, when these hundreds of people looked at Jesus, they saw someone who appeared to be just like everybody else. But not John! John looked up, saw his cousin walking in his direction, raised his finger and said, "Look there! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." John the Baptist perceived what everyone else missed. And that's my point: John the Baptist perceived the deeper reality that everyone else missed.

My brothers and sisters, we live in a world right now in which a similar phenomenon is taking place with respect to the human person and basic life issues. For example, when we, as Christians, look at another human being, we see an individual of infinite value, an individual made in God's image and likeness, an individual with an immortal soul, an individual deserving of the utmost respect from the moment of conception to the moment of natural death.

But the sad and tragic fact is that many others do not *see* any of those things when they look at a fellow human being. When they look at another man or woman what they see is a cluster of cells, a product of conception, a disposable item, an object to be used for their own pleasure, a being no more valuable than a mosquito. They are like the crowds that stood with John that day on the banks of the Jordan River: they do not perceive the deeper reality of each person's dignity.

But unfortunately, the "perception problem," as I would call it, goes beyond this, even affecting some who would call themselves "pro-life." Here I'm thinking of those who do not perceive that abortion is the key social issue of our time. These people would say, "Of course I'm pro-life, but I think there are other social issues which are just as important as abortion: poverty, racism, violence, capital punishment and the like. Therefore all issues should be treated equally." The problem with that position is that it's contrary to what our Holy Father has said, and it's contrary to common sense.

As John Paul II told us during his pastoral visit of 1987:

"Feeding the poor and welcoming refugees, reinforcing the social fabric of this nation, promoting the true advancement of women, securing the rights of minorities, pursuing disarmament, while guaranteeing legitimate defense: all this will succeed *only if respect for life and its protection by law is granted to every human being from conception until natural death*. Every human person, no matter how vulnerable or helpless, no matter how young or how old, no matter how healthy, handicapped or sick, no matter how useful or productive for society, is a being of inestimable worth created in the image and likeness of God. This is the dignity of America, the reason she exists, the condition of her survival, the ultimate test of her greatness: to respect every human person, especially the weakest and most defenseless ones, those as yet unborn."

The Holy Father, who certainly has the perception of John the Baptist, rightly understands that a person's position on the issue of abortion will ultimately affect his or her position on every other social and moral issue. Common sense should tell us that if we do not have respect for the innocent human life inside the womb, sooner or later we will not have any respect for the not-so-innocent human life outside the womb. We wonder why so many young people today exhibit such violent behavior. I'm convinced it's because they have grown up in a world where violence toward pre-born babies is considered acceptable behavior. And so these young people think to themselves: "If it's okay to kill that innocent baby, what is so bad about killing that guy in school who's been mean to me? He's certainly not innocent. If there are some innocent babies who don't deserve to live, then he certainly doesn't deserve to live."

Another area where the "perception problem" exists is what I would call "the contraception connection." This connection between contraception and abortion, as well as the connection between contraception and other social and moral evils, has been clearly affirmed by two great prophets of the latter 20th century: John Paul II and Paul VI. With the keen perception of John the Baptist, these two men have seen what so many intellectuals have completely missed.

In the *Gospel of Life*, our Holy Father says that although "they are specifically different evils" both abortion and contraception are "fruits of the same tree," rooted in "a self-centered concept of freedom" (13) Marvelously put! In other words, at the root of both abortion and contraception is pure, unadulterated human selfishness. The person using contraception says to his or her spouse, "You exist for me. Your purpose is to give me pleasure—to satisfy my desires." The action itself proclaims that message. The advocate of abortion says, "Pregnancy is a disease and children are a nuisance. I should not have to be bothered dealing with either one."

And then in 1968, that much-persecuted prophet Paul VI clearly annunciated the perennial teaching of the Church--that there are two purposes of marital sex: to have children and to establish a loving union between the spouses. And he indicated that whenever these two purposes are separated through a contraceptive act, it actually harms the relationship between a husband and wife.

Back then of course, most people laughed at such an idea. They said, "Holy Father, you've got to be kidding. Don't you realize artificial birth control is a great blessing! It will make for stronger marriages. Couples won't have to worry about unwanted pregnancies anymore. It will lessen marital anxiety. It will make for happier relationships and stronger families."

The Pope said, "Don't be fooled!" He warned that if artificial contraception ever became accepted and widespread, there would be many negative consequences: he said that there would be more infidelity in marriages; he said that women would be treated more and more like objects by men; he said that morals would be lowered in society as a whole; and he predicted that some governments would try to push birth control on poor countries—just like the United States does today.

On every count, he was right! He had the perception of the Baptist when so many others were blinded by their hormones! Praise God, some 30 years later, many are now finally seeing the truth and embracing it—so there is hope!

On that note, I just finished reading a great book that I'll recommend to you. It's called *Physicians Healed*, and it's published by *One More Soul*. It consists of personal testimonies by 15 doctors (obstetricians, gynecologists and family practitioners) who have stopped giving all contraception to their patients, and not all of them are Catholic! They have all become promoters and teachers of Natural Family Planning, which, contrary to popular belief, is *not* the old "Rhythm Method." It's a scientific method of fertility awareness which can be used either to achieve or avoid a pregnancy, and which, when used properly, is acceptable to the Church and is as effective as any means of contraception.

One of the doctors cited in this book wrote the following in his personal testimony. This, I would say, speaks volumes:

I now realize that contraception is neither good nor necessary. May the Lord forgive me for those human embryos I eliminated with IUDs. Mea culpa. May the Lord forgive me for those human embryos I eliminated with Norplant. Mea culpa. May the Lord forgive me for those human embryos I eliminated with the rape protocol. Mea culpa. May the Lord forgive me for those human embryos I eliminated with birth control pills. Mea maxima culpa.

As physicians, we should realize that the popes have far more wisdom on ethical issues than we could imagine. We can only appreciate their wisdom by following their teachings. We are not smart enough to overrule their infallible reasons. Eight years of medical training does not counterbalance 2,000 years of Catholic tradition. To learn, we must adopt an open-minded attitude of humility and obedience.

Now there's a doctor with the insight and perception of John the Baptist!

May all of us in this cathedral tonight be willing to open our minds to the fullness of God's truth as taught by his Church, so that we can become true apostles for life in this present culture of death. May we follow the example of John and proclaim this truth without compromise and without shame. And may we always point to Jesus like John did, telling those who have had abortions and performed abortions and used contraception, "Don't despair. Look, there is the Lamb of God, who will take away your sin--if you simply go to him in Confession;" and saying to the whole world, "Look, there is the Lamb of God who came to give us life—not death—*life!* Treasure this gift, nurture this gift on earth, and receive the fullness of the gift someday in heaven."

Amen.

Discussion Questions:

- (1) Discuss the relationship between the Gospel reading (John 1:29-34) and Father Suriani's focus on recognizing the harm posed to human dignity, abortion and contraception.

- (2) Fr. Suriani makes an important reference to the duty of the medical community to take another look at prescribing birth control. To what extent should doctors observe the Church's teaching on procreation and contraception?

"This Sort of Talk Is Hard to Endure! How Can Anyone Take It Seriously?"

By

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My brothers and sisters, today the Church concludes the section from the Gospel of John on the Bread of Life. We have heard for five weeks now about the necessity of receiving Jesus in the Eucharist. But the disciples are still protesting; their reaction, we must admit, seems perfectly logical. How can he possibly offer us His body to eat and His blood to drink? This type of talk is foolish, they say. We benefit from twenty centuries of belief in the Eucharist, so we may not share these same doubts, as did the disciples. But do we doubt other teachings of Christ and His Church? Do we find them hard to accept?

What about our second reading from Ephesians: "*Wives should be submissive to their husbands as if to the Lord because the husband is head of his wife just as Christ is head of His body, the Church, as well as its savior . . . Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the Church. He gave himself up for her to make her holy . . . Husbands should love their wives as they do their own bodies.*"

How many young people today would be willing to choose this as a reading at their wedding? It is a tough teaching, and we may be tempted to say, like the disciple, "This is too much! This sort of talk is nonsense!"

In this passage, St. Paul eloquently presents the true meaning of Christian marriage. It is not something that we should turn off at the outset because we dislike words like "submissive." Rather, we should strive to understand and appropriate the full meaning of what God is showing us in this passage.

The model for Christian marriage that Paul presents is that of Christ and His Church. Christ gives himself up for His bride, the Church. He dies on the Cross, surrendering His life for those whom He loves. Husbands, like Christ, should give up their lives for their wives and children. They should be willing to die to themselves and their own desires in deference to the ones they love. This is why husbands are seen as the providers and guardians of the family. They are willing to die, if necessary, to save the lives of their loved ones.

The blockbuster movie, "Air Force One," starring Harrison Ford as the President of the United States, depicts the hijacking of Air Force One by communist terrorists. Along with his aides, the President's family is also aboard. The Secret Service rushes him to a special escape pod and insists that he flee to safety. That is his duty to his country, the prevailing logic goes. Unbeknownst to his aides, our hero climbs out of the escape pod before it ejects and remains on board the plane. He knows that he must protect and defend his family, even if it means sacrificing his own life. While this is not a recommendation for the movie, and the tale may seem fantastic, the point is well made. The love that the President shows for his wife and children is boundless; he would rather die than abandon his family. This is the love that Christ has for the Church, and it is the love that husbands should have for their wives.

In light of this, it is much easier to understand Paul's words that wives should be submissive to their husbands. Permit me to explain. In our reading Paul recalls the words of Genesis which speak of the creation of Adam and Eve: "*For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall cling to his wife, and the two shall be made into one.*" The two become one; their identity is found in each other. It is for that reason that a couple's name changes after marriage. They are no longer two, but one. This week my parents will celebrate their 36th

wedding anniversary. On that day 36 years ago they were no longer James Taphorn and Joan Schram, but Mr. and Mrs. James Taphorn. From this sign alone we can see that there should not be a clash of wills in a marriage, as if two single people were both trying to run the same household. No, a husband who loves his wife as Christ loves the Church would not demand anything inappropriate or selfish; and a wife who is submissive to her husband in the sense Paul describes here would be equally willing to make sacrifices for the sake of her spouse and children. What we are talking about here then is a *mutual submission, a mutual self-offering* of the two individuals for the sake of the one family. Yes, Christ and the Church are one just as husbands and wives are one. In both cases there is a love so intimate, so exclusive, and so faithful, that the identity of one is found in the other.

For married couples, the marital act is the sign of this exclusive and faithful love. Sex is not something bad or dirty; it is holy and sacred. And for this reason it is to be expressed only in the context of marital love, marital fidelity. Sex outside of marriage, outside of this total commitment and self-surrender cheapens a holy act and defiles it; it reduces sex to something less than it is.

Because the marital act is the sign of total self-surrender, it naturally bears fruit. It enhances the love couples share and is the instrument God has designed for the transmission of new life. You might say that the love a couple has for each other can be named—Mary, or Billy, or Johnny. It is for this reason that contraception is gravely wrong. It betrays the meaning of the marital act. It is no longer a *total* self-giving; it is saying, at the same time, “yes, but no.”

Is this kind of talk too much to endure? Is Father crazy? Can he really mean what he is saying? Yes, I do. This is not an easy teaching. I know that. I remember when I was a junior in high school at Creighton Prep in Omaha. I took a moral values class. In class our teacher presented the Church’s teaching on contraception. I thought it was crazy. It took me a long time to understand and accept what the Church teaches. It came about as the result of much prayer and study.

Jesus, too, knows that this is not an easy teaching. And if you find yourself struggling with this, you are not alone. But know that Jesus shares His life and His grace with us, and He is always calling us to give more and more of ourselves, so that we can receive more and more of His grace in our lives. Like many of the disciples, Peter probably did not fully understand the teaching on the Eucharist. But he knew Jesus, and was willing to trust Him. God gave him the grace to believe.

If you find this teaching hard to take, I invite you to be open to what the Church offers, to really learn what the Church teaches and why. She knows that couples may have a genuine need to plan their families and that right is to be respected. But there is a right way and a wrong way. Here in Norfolk we are blessed to have a Natural Family Planning center just a couple of blocks from here at the east campus of Faith Regional. Natural Family Planning is the *right* way. Please feel free to talk to me anytime about questions or struggles you might have with this teaching. No one condemns you. Rather, the words Jesus offers are spirit and life.

When we approach the altar today to receive the Eucharist, we are given an invitation and a challenge. Will we be like the disciples who broke away and left the company of Jesus and said, “*This sort of talk is hard to endure! How can anyone take it seriously?*” Or will we be like Peter and apostles, who trusted and said to Him, “*Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life?*”

Discussion Question:

- Discuss the relationship between the Gospel reading (John 6:60-69) and Father Taphorn’s focus on obedience to the Church’s teaching on procreation even though many around us reject it.