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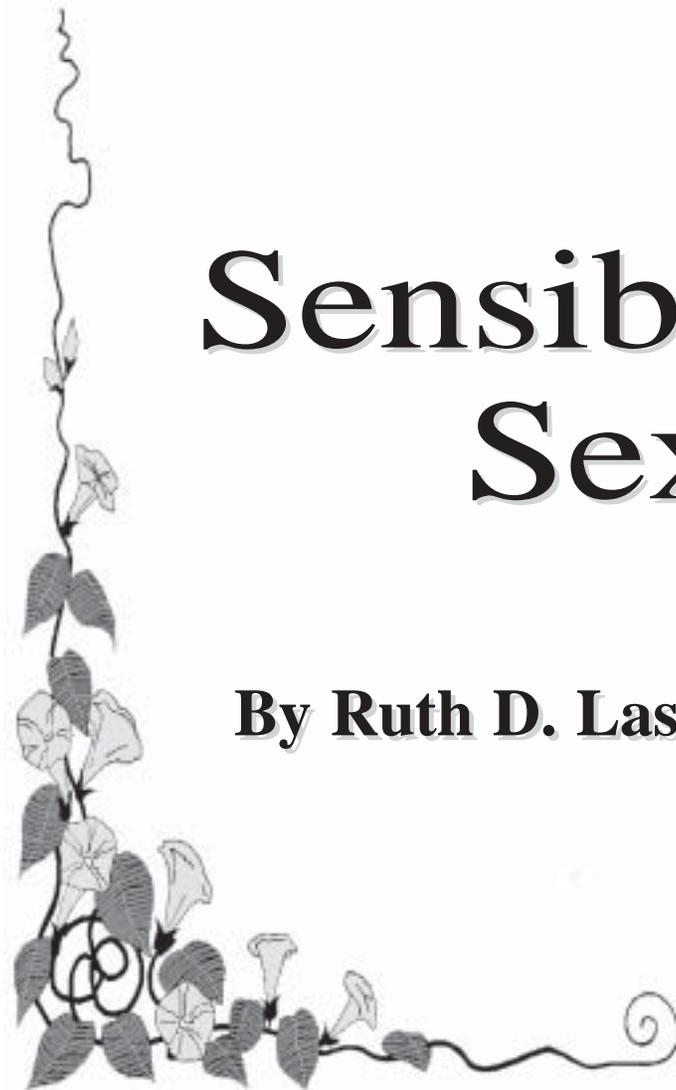
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# Sensible Sex

**By Ruth D. Lasseter**



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Published with permission by:

**ONE MORE SOUL**  
616 Five Oaks Avenue  
Dayton, OH 45406

First printing: April 1998

Previously printed in Homiletic and Pastoral Review  
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children to save sex for marriage and to uphold standards of chastity for them? Would not widespread knowledge and endorsement of Natural Family Planning restore respect for women and the family to its rightful place in society? Would it not strongly censure or forbid pornographic material as the vile exploitation that it is?

This “tar baby” has seen the consequences of contraceptives in her own life and marriage. I’d gladly endure the briar-patch, once again, to find the freedom and sanctity of married love that has been restored to us through familiarity with NFP. It really is the only truly sensible way of family planning.



Three old friends, middle-aged mothers all, are having lunch together. Nancy is a Methodist minister; the other, Mary Ann, is Catholic and a pro-life executive; the third is myself, a convert to Catholicism and freelance writer. The subject of contraception comes up.

“Why can’t you Catholics just do it the *sensible* way,” says Nancy in a good-natured crack.

“It may *look* sensible to you, Nancy, but you know the facts as well as I do: the society that accepts contraception inevitably comes to accept abortion, too.” states Mary Ann.

As for me, like the tar baby, I ain’t sayin’ nuthin’. I listen to my two friends argue, their kind faces rigid and defensive now, and I am silent because I feel the “tar” of my own sins. I once thought, like Nancy, that artificial contraception was sensible. But Mary Ann is right; a contracepting society becomes a society that sanctions abortion and euthanasia, as experience and research have shown. My friends are deadlocked within these two irreconcilable attitudes toward unnatural contraception: Is it sensible? Or is it a preliminary to genocide, or at least infanticide? The Catholic Church recognizes that there can be no resolution and no compromise between the two attitudes, as incompatible as oil and water.

*... the difference, both anthropological and moral, between contraception and recourse to the rhythm of the cycle ... is a difference which is much wider and deeper than is usually thought, one which involves in the final analysis two irreconcilable concepts of the human person and of human sexuality.*

*(Familiaris Consortio, section 32, p. 30)*

Nancy, Mary Ann, and I are pro-life and pro-family Christian women; we are educated, responsible, and experienced. We have a host of subjects to discuss and many things in common. Yet we cannot discuss contraceptives. It isn’t just that birth control is a tacky and taboo subject. Like all proper women have always done, we might (and do) freely talk about other equally tacky and private matters — labor and childbirth and nursing, child rearing (up to puberty, at least), piles and constipation, indigestion and canker sores, crime and pornography. But not contraception. It divides friends and ruins lunches. To Nancy, the method of Natural

Family Planning seems so unsensible, so unnecessary; it seems like the Amish using candlelight instead of electricity. To Mary Ann, the means are everything, since as she says, “they may lead to other ends than those intended or desired.”

What’s going on here? There’s more than personal preference for an archaic technology, more than candlelight and electricity, that causes friends to fall silent and defensive. We don’t talk about, don’t ask about, don’t discuss contraception. Easier just to swallow a pill, have our husbands put on sheaths, or have ourselves “fixed.”

Why can’t we talk about it? Are we too ashamed and hurt to do so? Too tarred? We women have submitted our female sexuality’s cyclic nature to the constant male sex drive of our husbands. Are we *ashamed* to have made ourselves *always* available to our spouses, from the very beginning of marriage beyond our menopause? Ashamed to admit that we sophisticated and independent women have followed the Old Wives’ Tale that a woman **MUST** be available for her man? Why do we not ask ourselves, if not other women, why we should feel ashamed and exploited in having done so? Are we afraid that the answer just *might* be another Old Wives Tale: that a man will leave her for another, more accommodating woman, if she doesn’t “turn on the heat.” Or that he might find her boring if they have to *talk* only and not work out their tensions in the bedroom. Most self-respecting women won’t admit to themselves or anyone else that they, too, share petty jealousy, suspicion, resentment and even secret sympathy with the radical feminists, whose politics and tactics are deplorable. Yet, we should talk, for the answer is none of these phantoms. It is true that women who contracept do feel exploited by their husbands; husbands who resort to condoms feel resentment towards their wives’ fertility. Here is another social rift; husbands and wives don’t talk about contraceptives, either. As our own beloved children grow into puberty, we who are using unnatural contraceptives cannot talk to them about sexual chastity and self-control, even in the face of AIDS and STDs and every sort of promiscuously born disease of soul and body. Even while we are told that we are

We don't talk about,  
don't ask about, don't  
discuss contraception.

It is not, as our ignorant brethren assume, that a woman should have as many babies as she possibly can, no matter what her health or the family’s finances. It is that we should seek, first, the kingdom of heaven and to do no harm to others, to violate no life, no love.

We are rational creatures and are expected to use **RIGHTLY** our reason and our free will when approaching the holy ground of our sexuality. These brief periods of abstinence, of shared sacrifice, become times of love-making of another sort, of thanksgiving for God’s gift of each to the other, each other’s love, and the miracle of being loved.

*In this context the couple comes to experience how conjugal communion is enriched with those values of tenderness and affection, which constitute the inner soul of human sexuality in its physical dimension also. In this way sexuality is respected and promoted in its truly and fully human dimension and is never “used” as an “object” that, by breaking the personal unity of soul and body, strikes at God’s creation itself at the level of the deepest interaction of nature and person.*

*(Familiaris Consortio, section 32)*

The spousal union remains one of unconditional love between the spouses, and each carries the grace of Christ in sexuality, a grace found in a thousand daily acts of intimacy and of love to the beloved other.

*“God does not ask the impossible, but by His commands, instructs you to do what you are able, to pray for what you are not able that He may help you.”*

*(Casti Connubii, section IV, p. 31)*

In His boundless Mercy, He also forgives those who have not been able to “preserve in wedlock their chastity unspotted.” Blessedly, there can be granted a second spring, a second virginity within marriage. Through God’s forgiveness, chastity between spouses can be restored to its divine purity, its unconditional love.

We women have always held the sexual standards of society and had the responsibility for our children’s moral education. Now, we have the knowledge of our own fertility. Is it unreasonable to ask our husbands to respect this, to center relations around *female* sexuality instead of the male sexual drive? In doing so, would it not then be easier to teach our

Some will no doubt say that had we not lost our faith, we would not have resorted to contraception and would not have been tempted toward any cult; no doubt this is accurate. Others may think that we were only looking for something upon which to pin the woes of an already troubled marriage and chose contraception as the goat. This is not accurate; we know the facts and have presented them faithfully. From the beginning, we were given a great love; we unintentionally betrayed that love through the deliberate choosing of an inherently evil act. It matters not that our original intentions were sincere and benevolent. Sincerity does not undo reality. Through consciously choosing unnatural contraception and through buying into Jungianism as a substitute for religion, we abandoned our faith and ushered in the unhappy consequences that followed. Those consequences are not to be underestimated, for nothing less than eternal salvation, our family's permanence, and unconditional love is at stake.

Christian newly-weds are not faced with the same isolation that we were at the time of our marriage. Nor do they have to rely on calendar rhythm. Thanks to doctors John and Elizabeth Billings, to John and Sheila Kipply, and to the research of others, the symptoms of a woman's fertility are known and easy to determine now, as they were not twenty-five years ago. The Couple to Couple League (P. O. Box 111184, Cincinnati, Ohio, 45211) is reliable in teaching couples how to use Natural Family Planning, which is in complete accord with the doctrines of the church and which violates no aspect of marriage, neither the unitive nor the procreative. Through fertility awareness and a few days per month of abstinence, couples can be sensible in their family planning, spontaneous in their sexual union, and true to the will of God. That will is to offer every act of marriage thoughtfully, responsibly, and prayerfully to God who sustains us and our love.

*The choice of the natural rhythms involves accepting the cycle of the ... woman, and thereby accepting dialogue, reciprocal respect, shared responsibility and self-control. To accept the cycle and to enter into dialogue means to recognize both the spiritual and corporal character of conjugal communion and to live personal love with its requirement of fidelity.*

*(Familiaris Consortio, section 32)*

free at last, we know that we are helpless; we give our children condoms and are silent about chastity; we feel heartbroken, not knowing why. The tar is on us all.

## The Contraceptive Mentality

I am going to "break silence." I have a story to tell. I want to tell this story so that other married couples may have the courage to know themselves and to begin talking again about their marriage and their love, and so come to find between them a truly Christian theology of the body. My perspective is unusual, but hardly unique; I am Protestant in heritage, Catholic by conversion. Having been connected since birth with a science and medicine-friendly family, I am quite familiar with the marvels of modern medical technology, including the whole hog of contraceptive devices, which are hardly conducive to health and well being.

Since a story is a story, it can not be a rational argument. However, my story may be useful as an example for the arguments put forth by others who have the gift of apologetics, as I do not. Janet E. Smith's fine book, *Humanae Vitae: A Generation Later*, has just been published by the Catholic University of America Press; its 425 pages contain a very complete and convincing rational argument in defense of the Catholic Church's unbroken teaching on unnatural contraception. In addition to offering a new translation of the encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, it is a very sensible book.

I grew up with the two great Protestant imperatives: first, the importance of the individual's responsibility in forming a great love bond with his Creator (achieved through reading and meditating on scripture, through personal prayer, through charitable acts); second, the realization of the good of passionate, romantic love between man and woman. It would take a book to discuss the particulars of these two Protestant pillars and how they have been pulled down by the permissiveness of our age — a modern God-hating Samson. While the pillars remain standing for the Evangelical Protestants, who strongly oppose abortion, they may yet topple because of these sects' general acceptance of

I am going to "break silence." I have a story to tell.

contraception, a silent destroyer of just that married love and mutual respect which Protestants have so long recognized and properly praised. Yet, there are indications that at least some evangelical Protestants are beginning to rethink this issue; the January, 1992, issue of the journal *First Things* had a feature on this new trend.

The Catholic view is that contracepted sex is inherently sinful, an offence against God's will for the purpose of human sexuality, and divisive of the two aspects of sacred marriage — the unitive and generative. Despite widespread civil laws (the Comstock Laws, enacted by Protestant legislatures, which were in effect until the 1930s in this country) which banned contraceptive devices, modern Protestants cannot understand all the fuss; they think it's mere ecclesiastical and legalistic hair-splitting. An impassioned Anglican friend said to us recently, "It isn't these silly rules over contraception that we should be quibbling about! The affirmation of LOVE is what is so needed today and you Catholics don't seem to realize this!"

However, it is not a neat set of rules that is at stake.

Of course, it is true that the rules, and the quibble over rules, can lead away from love and from the vision of love. However, it is not a neat set of *rules* that is at stake. The sacredness of marital sexuality and its place in a greater divine order is what is at stake and under attack, and divorced from that order, the loss of love, indeed.

Under the guise of helping love, artificial contraception cunningly establishes a tyrant in the marriage: the sex act declines from a reaffirming of the whole marriage covenant, true lovemaking, to joint seeking of mutual satisfaction. A subtle shift, but a decisive one, away from God and the covenant of marriage.

The well-documented symptoms attending this shift are the grist of many marriage and sexual therapy manuals; yet, the authors of such books, many of them Christian, never consider that the contraceptive devices could be *causing* the familiar problems. The nuptial exchange between man and woman is replaced by a woman's sense, vague and minuscule at first, that she must be "available" to her husband; anxiety

have given so much allegiance to cultish thought, to Jungianism. The former violated the unity of our marriage; the latter denied and trivialized moral absolutes. This dual admission of guilt did not make it possible to reverse a biological procedure, which had removed my womb. It did make it possible to return to holiness, to find forgiveness, and to receive healing within our souls and marriage.

Until we came to this admission of error, we had gotten in the habit of denying that anything was wrong or, at most, justifying our actions, or casting blame on other people and each other. The most difficult act of all was admitting that we were wrong. We were wrong; we had sinned; we repented of that wrong and WE WERE FORGIVEN. We could, of course, have gone on living with no such admission of guilt; how heavy and sorrowful our lives, had we chosen self-pity and perpetual justification! Once such justification and blame begin, there is no end to it or the self-pity it generates. Yet, had we not sinned, there would have been no forgiveness, no grace — *O Felix Culpa!* Thanks be to God!

We were wrong; we had sinned; we repented of that wrong, and WE WERE FORGIVEN.

Unconditional love and trust has been given back to us, but it did not happen right away. We agreed that it wasn't enough to admit our faults to ourselves and to each other; we needed absolution. On our wedding anniversary, together we sought the sacrament of confession

We remember these former betrayals of love as mistakes, not to be repeated. Nothing can undo the *fact* that these things did happen. Yet, the memory is without bitterness and without recrimination, though not without regret. We are terribly sorry to have ever been apart from God and from each other. The most dreadful experience, the most absolute evil imaginable, is to be totally cut off from the unconditional love of God and from its vessel, the love of our spouse. We regret its having happened because we never wanted nor intended to hurt one another, nor to despair of God's presence in our lives. On the other hand, our experience has made us acutely aware of the power of unnatural contraceptives and of cult-like thought to effect just this horror in the lives of loving spouses.

## Reconciliation

One night, while driving alone to the grocery, inconspicuously, I prayed a desperate prayer, asking God's help and promising to do whatever I was told to do. God spoke to me then! He made it known to me that we could go no further until we ended our isolation and committed ourselves again to Christ's Church. I considered this revelation and finally came to the conclusion that, although we would be rejected and shunned by family and friends, the Roman Catholic Church (progressive and trendy as it seemed then) was what I had to choose. I told Rollin that very night that I intended to become a Catholic. He did not seem surprised and by the next morning revealed to me that this was what he, too, wanted to do.

On the day that we were formally received, I said to Rollin that it felt like we had just gotten married, again. There was no trained choir for this nuptial; the organ was preempted by a guitarist who throbbed the strings with heavy hand; the church building was ugly, a yellow brick, auditorium-like affair; the priest's holiness was less than exemplary. It didn't matter at all. What mattered was our surrender to Christ and to His Church; through this surrender the restoration of our marriage could begin.

Our conversion to Catholicism brought great joy, but also great sorrow. We could hardly bear to see the American Catholic Church chasing after the very trendiness and politics that we had just left behind. Why would Catholics no longer want to say the Rosary? Why would they want to have the Stations of the Cross, and other images, removed? Why did they hate the Holy Father and the

We admitted that we were **WRONG** to have done what we did.

church's teaching authority? How could they ever endorse abortion ... or contraception? Why did so many Catholics seem to mistrust their own beautiful heritage?

We began to think about these questions again. We were a long way from unconditional love or trust; that had been too badly shattered to be rebuilt in a week or even years. It was being rebuilt for us, however, by Him who had always been faithful, even when we were faithless.

We admitted that we were **WRONG** to have done what we did in ever using artificial contraception and, above all, in having a sterilization operation; we were also **WRONG** to

develops about "performance" and sensual attractiveness; she may begin to feel used by her spouse. The husband, in an equally subtle way, ceases to delight in his bride and begins to think of her as an object to arouse and satisfy passion. He has a vague sense that something is wrong; he feels restless and unsatisfied. If they try to talk about "what's wrong with us?" it often draws up petty resentments. They suspect, vaguely, that "something sexual" is wrong. They may just as often conclude that "something spiritual" is wrong. A vast and foggy field, in either case. They just don't seem able to come to an understanding over their difficulties. This couple may in every other way be moral and exemplary Christians; it has never occurred to them that artificial contraception could be destroying their marriage covenant and their love.

They suspect, vaguely, that "something sexual" is wrong.

They may seek help for what they perceive is a sexual problem; they are encouraged, and sincerely try, to be more loving, considerate, and attentive to one another. They may pray together, but as the secrets of their innermost hearts have already been shut to each other and to God, the Lord and Giver of life, their prayer is blocked; they may develop a distaste for religion in all forms. Over all, there is a secret resentment against the other for his/her lack of ... whatever it was that used to make life so good. The husband thinks: "If only she would stop this complaining and snap out of it! I'm doing the best that I can to show her that I love her, but it's not good enough for her." The wife thinks: "He doesn't love me anymore. He says that he does, but he doesn't really mean it. What can I do?" When there are children present, there is usually enough shared love for these children to keep the husband and wife in charity, but there is no doubt that *eros* (and *caritas*, reverence, and respect) between the couple is lessened or nonexistent. The last thing that such a couple will do is consider jettisoning the contraceptive device. They are likely to heed popular remedies: develop more sex appeal or get more involved in the community, or even do more things together as a family.

If a woman should have a surprise pregnancy at such a crisis as this, she is very likely to consider a secret abortion in

a desperate attempt to save her husband's love. She may seek among women (often of charismatic or even feminist or New Age persuasion) the emotional contact and spiritual fellowship which is ebbing away from the marriage. She is likely to develop a distaste for "maleness"; her own vile thoughts may shock and disgust her. For his part, the husband may begin to wonder if a little innocent flirtation with another woman could really be so harmful. He may begin to treat his wife

*This tiny thing is so very subtle and slow in its tyrannical effect and usurpation.*

disrespectfully (in ways other than having contraceptive sex with her). His own behavior may disturb him, so that, in order to avoid his wife, he begins to spend more time away from home. He may turn more energetically to his work and to

companionship with other males. He may begin to keep an eye out for the opportunity for a sexual misadventure. At no point is either aware that the communion of their marriage is betrayed by that lie, which began as such a tiny thing, accepted with such good intentions.

This tiny thing is so very subtle and slow in its tyrannical effect and usurpation; the small denials that anything is wrong (the unspoken concerns about damage inflicted on bodily health by the contraceptive device, the increased tension in conversation and in everyday life, the uneasy sense of future trouble, the steady growth of mistrust, the general boredom with family life in general and spousal sex in particular, the secret fantasies and desires) all go unnoticed until their cumulative effect has destroyed trust and made impossible the very love that the contracepting couple so fervently hoped to preserve. Yet, for most Protestants and a majority of Catholics, artificial birth control continues to be accepted and promoted as an unquestioned good.

### My Story

**O**n June 24, 1967, Rollin and I celebrated our wedding with a traditional Anglican marriage rite and nuptial mass. The church organ was amazingly pure, and there was a professional choir to sing three J.S. Bach hymns and the beautiful music of the Anglican liturgy. Our wedding took

and family to grieve or even mention it, not ever again. Who will listen to the "silent scream" within the agonized soul of such women? There was no one there for me, for us, and this was not even an abortion.

At this time, we heard from the Catholic couple, who had talked so strongly to us before we were married about the dangers of contraception; they were not getting along and were thinking about divorce. This stunned us! Here was another couple with seven children. What had gone wrong? We snapped out of our own self-pity to try and turn them away from separation and divorce.

Our friends told us that they had decided that the whole church was wrong, that it was just a power institution imposing rules on "little people" to spoil their sexual freedom.

*They talked about sex as if they were talking about a tennis match.*

They renounced their former convictions about the evils of unnatural contraception; they ridiculed themselves for ever having held such convictions. We were embarrassed by their rude jokes; they were insulting to each other; their language had become coarse and vulgar. Both had come to support abortion. They encouraged their children to use contraception themselves. They talked about sex as if they were talking about a tennis match. The final severance came when a newly launched affair with a female graduate student became public scandal.

We were really horrified by this; the same shoals lay dead ahead of us. The fact was that this couple had given up their faith. So had we. Like our friends, we had stopped going to church ourselves, but we had not gone so far as both to hate the church and to reject the sacraments. We had not quite despaired. We were very near despair, really in much greater danger than either of us knew at the time. We did know, however, that we had reached such a point of desolation in love that there were no more resources left to us and that we would soon be as lost as our lost friends.



was hospitalized for excessive hemorrhaging, another common but seldom publicized side effect. At the age of thirty, I was forced by deteriorating health to have a hysterectomy.

Until the hysterectomy, I had secret thoughts that the tubal ligation could be reversed, if we wanted more children. (N.B.: if we wanted more children; no longer *Thy Will Be Done*). After this second, more radical, operation, however, it was impossible to have any more children.

Thereafter, Rollin and I seldom talked about the operation or what had led up to it. We seldom talked at all. We became very touchy about “slights”; we were impatient and sometimes rude to each other; we were often filled with self-pity. Despite a steady and comfortable income, we quarreled constantly about money. We became stressed and tense. Our fears for the children’s safety became exaggerated to the point of panic; we were terrified that we would lose one of these precious, irreplaceable lives. We lost our sense of humor and seemed to bicker over everything. He began to lose respect for me and I for him. Aversion to intimacy began to develop. Life became a horrid burden to us both, each secretly resenting and blaming the other.

While we were still firmly opposed to abortion, we were no longer “pro-life” in any greater sense. Dark and cynical, we had become anti-life at a very basic level. When we talked about sexual matters, it was with a rather wry, sometimes bawdy, humor; it was no longer approached with reverence and awe.

Women who have had abortions must surely feel like this, too.

We seldom talked about anything else but our children, the one remaining source of delight to us both. It grieved me that I’d taken this veterinary approach, done this self-mutilation, to my body; quite irrationally, I blamed and

hated Rollin for it. However, everyone who knew of it praised us to the skies: clergyman, relatives, doctors, and psychologist; we had finally joined the contraceptive cult. Women who have had abortions must surely feel like this, too. Everyone else — other women, medical personnel, their lover or husband, their family, their minister (or even some priests) — will try to “be compassionate and sensitive to the needs of women” and to tell the aborted woman that what she did was okay, but she knows it was not okay. Yet, she isn’t allowed by these “sensitive” friends

place at the Trinity Episcopal Church, Indianapolis, which is a perfect replica of a 13th Century English church, complete with rood screen, painted roof, lych gate, and cloistered garden. On June 23, I was confirmed at that same church; only five people were present at this ceremony, Bishop Grey (a tall, elderly man, radiating the odour of Anglican sanctity), Fr. Lynch (who had given me instruction and who presided at our wedding), Rollin (who was my sponsor), and his elderly mother. The Bishop gently urged me to fight “manfully” for Christ and to give my life entirely into God’s care; he confirmed me with a light slap on my cheek. In memory, that tap, symbolic of the suffering that a Christian must endure, has become a stunning blow.

It is significant that my vow of obedience to Christ came the day before our vows of fidelity to our marriage in Christ. The vow of unconditional love and fidelity from Christ, for Christ, was immediately followed by our vows of unconditional love and fidelity for one another. Because of the immediate proximity of these rites to one another, the symbolic blow of Christian suffering and the symbolic kiss of unconditional love have flowed over the years, especially at times of crisis, from one into the other until they have become one. Suffering and sweetness are indivisible; both are essential. The adventure of faith, lived out in sacramental marriage, is one, great, mysterious union of suffering and unconditional love.

Everyone else ... looked on artificial contraception as a great medical breakthrough, a positive good ...

As we began our preparation for marriage, we talked with everyone we knew who could help us make a good start. One Catholic couple, very dear to us, talked of the importance of family life and warned us about the dangers of contraception; they called it “psychological infanticide.” Theirs was the only voice we heard that spoke of unnatural contraception as an evil; the encyclical *Humanae Vitae* was still a year away from publication. Everyone else with whom we talked looked on artificial contraception as a great medical breakthrough, a positive good, about which there could be no possible objection.

Aside from the Great New Reproductive Technology, talking about sexual matters twenty-five years ago, even with

a clergyman or a doctor, was a very difficult thing to do; other than “among the girls,” people did not discuss such private matters. Nevertheless, the sexual deviations were beginning to erupt on a vast scale and we needed to know how to establish our marriage in a Christian framework; there were few resources available. We asked Fr. Lynch, the venerable clergyman who married us, to help us with this matter of artificial contraception in our upcoming marriage. He replied that artificial contraception was warranted in some cases. He went on to state, mistakenly, that Catholicism had limited the purpose of sex to procreation only, and that the Anglican tradition held that while marriage must be open to procreation “in general,” it need not be open to procreation in every act. That sounded convincing to untried postulants; we did not spot the logical flaw until years later. We know it well now. By the same formula of totality, extended into marital fidelity, need every act of sexual union necessarily be with one’s spouse? Couldn’t one affirm, by the principle of totality, that if one affirmed marriage *most* of the time, did one have to be faithful to marriage *all* of the time, every single time? The widespread infidelity, which followed closely behind the argument for totality in matters of contraception, is no accident; in fact, contraception made the concupiscence and its justification possible.

*We wanted to be faithful to God, to our love, and to the family we hoped to have.*

to our love, and to the family we hoped to have. We were not sure what to do, and we were too shy about such matters to talk freely yet with one another. My doctor, parents, and friends (all well meaning) urged various methods and devices upon us; dire warnings were whispered about what would happen to our love if I were to get pregnant too soon. This was disheartening and very scary; Rollin was told similar well-intended lies.

In the end, we decided to listen to our Catholic friends who had warned us about the inherent evil of contraception.

marriage, but we failed to convince him or to receive any support. We observed total abstinence for many months. Then, I made a radical decision and had a sterilization operation.

What made me change my mind, our minds? Two catalysts and a single cause. First, Rollin strongly and openly opposed the Episcopal Church’s trend toward the ordination of women, the endorsement of various sexual aberrations, and the acceptance of abortion. The Episcopal bishop, a liberal fellow, would not accept him as a candidate. The bishop’s rejection was devastating to him, and I determined that he didn’t need to feel rejected by his wife, as well. This well-intended wifely solicitude was as much tainted by the serpent’s pride as was the contraceptive advertisement for spermicidal foam that I’d bought into so many years before; it was just another variation of “You gave him life, now give him yourself.” The second catalyst was the growing influence of Jungian psychology and Jungian devotees in our life. Like the contraceptive mentality, Jungianism exhibits a definite cultishness in its proud rejection of revealed Christian truth and moral authority. Behind both catalysts was a single cause: loss of faith. Under severe pressure from calamity both within and without, we abandoned our faith and trust in God and in each other.

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Rollin was opposed to the ligation, but I had the so-called “Band-Aid” operation, anyway. (“It’s my body and my decision,” I had parroted). No one else opposed this surgery at all, quite the opposite, in fact. The very first effect of this, as in an abortion, was relief. That relief didn’t last long. Ensuing hormonal imbalance caused a deep, prolonged depression. In fact, as I later learned, my estrogen level dropped to a menopausal level, literally, overnight. I gained a lot of weight in a very short time, another common side effect. My mind was confused; and I was filled with irrational resentment. There was abdominal pain for months after the surgery, probably caused by the nitrous oxide gas that was used to inflate my abdomen for surgery. Periods became so heavy that twice I

## Discouragement and Alienation

**O**ur faith and our confidence came under very heavy siege, however, as the universities began to crumble, the judicial system to capitulate, and the Episcopal Church to succumb to radical feminism and homosexual politics. Unknown to ourselves, we were becoming desperate; we were too much alone and we were afraid of the changing world's condition and our children's maturation into it. Everywhere, everyday, we met relentless hammering against our faith and hostility against us for our choices. Despair! Despair! Despair pounded against our over-tired minds, weakening our resolve and eroding our sense of purpose.

In 1974, the year that Helen was born, Rollin sacrificed his tenured university position to begin studying for the ministry in the Episcopal church. The reasons for my opposition to Rollin's decision to do this would serve as a strong warning against married clergy in the Roman Catholic Church. Briefly, I did not see how we were to continue our soul-to-soul intimacy of marriage when he, necessarily, could not confide to me concerns heard by him in the confessional and elsewhere. More important, there was no way that our domestic church could remain as important to him as the parish church was bound to become, and, sooner or later, this would surely cause great problems for me and for our children.

At this time, Rollin and I decided that six children were all we could manage for awhile. Not being able to accept any known form of birth control as moral and consistent with God's will, and knowing the unreliability of "rhythm," we would observe total abstinence, we decided.

At the recommendation of some Catholic friends, we sought the help of their beloved Monsignor. We told our story and our intention and asked his help, advice, and prayers. He replied that abstinence was "too heroic," and, as we were not Catholics, he did not understand why we did not just use contraception. ("Do it the sensible way," I hear my friend Nancy echo). We tried to explain that we were seeking to be obedient to God's will in both the procreative and unitive aspects of our

We decided that we would begin by giving ourselves to the will of God. We strengthened one another in faith; we reassured each other that our high and holy love would endure. We also assured ourselves that we could accept and provide for children, if they came early in our marriage. Besides all this, it was highly repugnant to us, as to any romantic couple, to carefully plan out and buy "life insurance" for every risk of life. This was an adventure! We were certain of the high quest and vocation of marriage. We told each other that we could not give allegiance to Christ and at the same time dictate the extent and terms of His grace in our lives. So, we galloped off together with very high spirits and a bit too much self-congratulation on our great undertaking.

During the first summer after our marriage, we conceived a baby, but I had a miscarriage in the first few weeks of pregnancy. The same thing happened again in the Fall, and again in the winter. My OB-GYN told us that, for one reason or another, we would probably never be able to have children. This was both disappointing and confusing; had we not eagerly given ourselves to the Lord of Life? Why were these tiny lives not carried to term? Didn't God care about them and us as we thought? Things weren't going our way.

Of course, we hadn't really surrendered to the will of God. We were eager to do so, but did not know about suffering, yet; we were young and looked only for the sweetness of God's gifts of love. We reviewed our first year of marriage, how much it meant to us and how we had come to find both love and holiness, which we never imagined, possible. Finally, we came to the certainty that we were wrong to demand that God give us children. Shortly after this, we became pregnant again, and our infant son, John, was born at full-term in December 1968.

When John was born, we were blessed with a profound and awe-full experience of the holiness of life. Here was a child, a unique human being with a particular destiny in history. Where had he come from? How marvelous to have been so chosen to be his parents! This wonder, this awe, at the fact of a new life and at the certainty of his God-given origins has never

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lessened with ensuing births: Will, Katie, Austin, Ben, and Helen. They are all “wonderfully and mysteriously made.”

About the time of John’s birth, the contraceptive controversy was in full fury. Six months previously, *Humanae Vitae* had been issued and everyone was talking about it, Protestants and Catholics, alike. The document was, above all, incomprehensible. No one could believe that the “men of Rome” could be so backwards, so insensitive, so benighted as to deny this “help” to married couples. Those crazy clerics ridiculously predicted that contraception would open a Pandora’s box of most dire ills: rogue male behavior, breakup of families, irreverence for women, cheapening of sex, increased violence and rape, abortion, child abuse, and euthanasia. It’s grim to realize how fast these evils did rush into society, just as the “stupid” encyclical warned that they would.

One of the ... booklets that was given me at the hospital contained an advertisement for spermicidal foam.

One of the “help for new mothers” booklets that was given me at the hospital contained an advertisement for spermicidal foam. It featured a picture of a sweet young mother holding a tiny infant to her breast; the

caption beneath read: “You gave him life. Now, give him yourself.” The serpent at his most eloquent! Foam was a fairly new product. Unlike the pill, it did not cause blood clots and high blood pressure; it did not interfere with the spontaneity of the sex act; it purported to prevent conception. Like Eve and her apple, I showed it to Adam and bade him eat.

When we discovered that we were pregnant and would have another baby within a year of the first, we quarrelled seriously and viciously for the first time in our marriage. I had hated using the foam; it made me feel cheap. Rollin, taken unprepared, was annoyed at the prospect of another baby; he felt tricked by me.

The bitterness of this first quarrel *should* have alerted us to the effects of contraception on married love and trust. We did resolve, once again, to avoid using unnatural contraceptives, but were still unconvinced that *Humanae Vitae* was right as a universal statement for all Christians and all marriages.

A half-educated, partially committed effort at the calendar rhythm method was, most happily, unsuccessful in avoiding new pregnancies. A year and a half after our second son, William, was born, our Katie came to us. One year later, our twins, Austin and Ben, were born. Then two years later, Helen came. A great multiplication of Love!

It is a recognized trend that the older parents grow, the less they remember of unpleasantness and trials in their young families. We are no exception. Our memory of that time is of mad-cap joy, knee-deep in babies and toddlers, six of them, age five and under! That we were sometimes so dead tired that we could barely push through the day is remembered only vaguely. In truth, I don’t think we slept more than a few hours any night for at least seven years, and we were always worried about how we were going to support our family. We were filled with trust in one another and with a sense of purpose, and we drew strength from it; it kept us from being overwhelmed by anxiety and fatigue. There was a sense of divine protection and mystery behind everything that happened in those years.

... the older parents grow, the less they remember of unpleasantness and trials in their young families.

Because we had chosen obedience to the will of God and had entrusted our fertility, as well as our souls, to one another, we knew the gift of unconditional love. This was a shared secret between us, given us by Christ, whose presence was constantly felt as a “third” in our marriage. This secret, pondered deeply in my heart and cherished in Rollin’s, took the form of enormous confidence about what we were doing. This was not pride, though pride is ever a threat in every human being, but rather a certainty born of deep reverence for and awareness of the presence of Christ’s holiness in our marriage. During this time, we thought a great deal about the revealed mysteries of Christianity; I said the rosary regularly and meditated often on Mary. Sometimes my thoughts would flow out to the Mother of God in silent, loving exchange; these meditative thoughts, really prayer-thoughts, concerned the developing child in my womb. Every event, every new life, was embraced as a prayer answered, was known to be willed, under the mercy of God.