

“The Two Shall Become One”

The Evils of Contraception and the Strengthening of Catholic Marriages through the Correct Teaching of Natural Family Planning

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The Breakdown of Family Life and Contraception

On February 10th, 1880 Pope Leo XIII published *Arcanum Divinae Sapientiae*, an encyclical whose main thesis is that the marriage contract and the sacrament cannot be separated. It therefore condemns divorce very strongly because marriage, elevated by Our Lord Jesus Christ to be a sacrament, is something sacred that cannot be touched by mere human institutions. Marriage is not merely a convention which the State can decide upon at whim. The Holy Father summarizes:

But, now, there is a spreading wish to supplant natural and divine law by human law; and hence has begun a gradual extinction of that most excellent ideal of marriage which nature herself had impressed on the soul of man, and sealed, as it were, with her own seal; nay, more, even in Christian marriages this power, productive of so great good, has been weakened by the sinfulness of man.¹

Marriage was established by God after the creation of our first parents so that they would transmit the life that He had given to them. In the first account of Creation we read that: “God created man in his image; in the divine image he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them, saying: “Be fertile and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it. Have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and all the living things that move on the earth.”” (Gn. 1: 27-28) So it is clear that the first duty of the first family was to generate children. They were given the Earth as their habitat. As St. Lawrence of Brindisi points out, the blessing that man receives, “consists first and foremost in the receipt of the power to propagate, so that the human species be multiplied in the number of persons lest the chief and noblest of species die out.”² In the second account of Creation we read that: “So the LORD God cast a deep sleep on the man, and while he was asleep, he took out one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. The LORD God then built up into a woman the rib that he had taken from the man. When he brought her to the man, the man said: “This one, at last, is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; This one shall be called ‘woman,’ for out of ‘her man’ this one has been taken.” That is why a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and the two of them become one body.” (Gn. 2: 21-24) As later Christ will interpret this text it marks the indissolubility of marriage. “Have you not read that from the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female’ and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and

¹ Pope Leo XIII, *Arcanum divinae sapientiae* 27, Rome, February 10, 1880.

² St. Lawrence of Brindisi, *On Creation and the Fall – A Verse by Verse Commentary on Genesis 1-3* (Mt. Jackson, VA: Kolbe Center, 2012), p. 93.

the two shall become one flesh'? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, no human being must separate.” (Mt. 19:4-6)

Marriage sanctifies the union of man and woman, and in these two accounts we see two ends of marriage clearly identified: procreative and unitive. In addition, if marriage is properly unitive it will also be a *remedium concupiscentiae*, as Pope Leo XIII shows in the previously cited passage by mentioning man’s sinfulness. Through marriage, there is a remedy in store for man’s wounded nature. Fifty years after Pope Leo XIII wrote *Arcanum divinae sapientiae*, Pope Pius XI will also recall this remedy when he begins his famous encyclical *Casti Connubii*:

...that Christ Our Lord, Son of the Eternal Father, having assumed the nature of fallen man, not only, with His loving desire of compassing the redemption of our race, ordained it in an especial manner as the principle and foundation of domestic society and therefore of all human intercourse, but also raised it to the rank of a truly and great sacrament of the New Law, restored it to the original purity of its divine institution, and accordingly entrusted all its discipline and care to His spouse the Church.³

While not to be intended as a “valve” to control certain disorders, this fruit of marriage is also clear from what St. Paul writes in 1 Cor. 7, 2: “But since sexual immorality is occurring, each man should have sexual relations with his own wife, and each woman with her own husband.” It shows the supernatural remedy that marriage is to many ills in society, and—according to Pope Pius XI—this can only occur if men’s minds are illuminated with the true doctrine of Christ regarding it and if Christian spouses shape their ways of thinking and acting in conformity with the “pure law of Christ so as to obtain true peace and happiness for themselves and for their families.”⁴

It is fundamental that we not forget that Original Sin has broken the harmony that ought to exist between man and woman. Man and woman are called to give themselves to each other, but this gift of self to the other is severely handicapped by the wound of Original Sin itself. It is thus that even today we read in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* something along the lines of the *remedium concupiscentiae*: “After the Fall, marriage helps to overcome self-absorption, egoism, pursuit of one's own pleasure, and to open oneself to the other, to mutual aid and to self-giving.”⁵ Therefore, given its very profound natural and supernatural significance, no one can meddle with marriage and expect there not to be long-ranging consequences.

The world is desperately in need of the grace of God, of salvation, and for this the Word became flesh. How He became flesh is also very significant, of course, because divine pedagogy teaches that He became flesh in a family. On October 21, 1921, upon an initiative of Pope Benedict XV, the Congregation for Rites inserted the Feast of the Holy Family in the Calendar of the Roman

³ Pope Pius XI, *Casti Connubii* 1, Rome, December 31, 1930.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁵ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) 1609.

Rite. This was clearly not the beginning of the devotion to the Holy Family. The fact that the Feast became part of the general calendar, however, was due to something else: the deep concern of the Holy Father for the breakdown of the family, especially in the wake of the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917 which threatened the family even further. Each time I read documents from the early part of the 20th century I notice that many good Catholic writers were lamenting the breakdown of the family and society back then, and I wonder: what would they say today? In many ways, they predicted what is happening today. When Pope Pius XI published *Casti Connubii* on December 31st 1930 it was as a reaction against what the Anglican Communion had recently permitted: contraception.

Enforcing what Leo XIII had stressed earlier against divorce and the State's unjust interference in what is a natural and divine institution, and advocating the model of the Holy Family which Pope Benedict XV sought to do with the feast which he universalized, Pope Pius XI showed the further risk to the family's breakdown through contraception and its false promises. While marriage

arises only from the free consent of each of the spouses...the nature of matrimony is entirely independent of the free will of man, so that if one has once contracted matrimony he is thereby subject to its divinely made laws and its essential properties.⁶

Contraception: Its Promises and its Consequences

As we know, the Church's position against contraception has its biblical basis. At one point we read in Genesis that Onan lay with Tamar, but he did not want her to become pregnant. Therefore he "spilled his seed on the ground." This act was "evil in the eyes of God and He took his life."⁷ The *coitus interruptus* was one of several methods which aimed at enjoying sexual relations while avoiding conception. Such contraception was not only denounced by the Catholic Church. Martin Luther, John Calvin and John Wesley all condemned birth control.⁸ However, in 1930 this united front showed a crack which would quickly widen with the results we see today. The Anglican bishops approved a resolution allowing the use of birth control in certain "extreme circumstances." Within 40 years of this date, almost all the Protestant churches (with notable exceptions like the Mormons and Amish) accepted the use of contraception.

The Catholic Church did not follow this current. On December 31st, 1930, Pope Pius XI issued his encyclical *Casti Connubii*, reaffirming the teaching of the Bible on the two ends of marriage.

⁶ *Casti Connubii* 6.

⁷ Gen. 38, 9-10.

⁸ Cf. Charles Provan, *The Bible and Birth Control* (Monongahela, PA: Zimmer Printing, 1989). In this book Charles Provan provides abundant quotations from Luther, Calvin, Wesley and others to substantiate this opposition to contraception.

After creating us male and female, God gave the first command “Be fertile and multiply.”⁹ In the following chapter the Creator gives the other motive for marrying: “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and cling to his wife and the two shall become one flesh.”¹⁰ That “the two shall become one” is intimately tied to the first end of marriage, i.e. procreation. It is for this reason that Pope Pius XI stressed that it is never licit to use artificial methods and that natural methods should only be used with strict limitations. He writes:

But no reason, however grave, may be put forward by which anything intrinsically against nature may become conformable to nature and morally good. Since, therefore, the conjugal act is destined primarily by nature for the begetting of children, those who in exercising it deliberately frustrate its natural power and purpose sin against nature and commit a deed which is shameful and intrinsically vicious.¹¹

This intimate tie between matrimony and the procreation and education of children is only reaffirmed in *Gaudium et Spes* 48: “By their very nature, the institution of matrimony itself and conjugal love are ordained for the procreation and education of children, and find in them their ultimate crown,” a point reiterated in G.S. 50: “Marriage and conjugal love are by their nature ordained toward the begetting and educating of children.”

The great majority of Catholics accepted this teaching up until the 1950s. What changed afterwards? Simply put, the discovery of the “pill.” This capsule was presented as the solution to almost all world problems: over-population, undesired pregnancies, abortion, child abuse, poverty associated with large families, and marriage stress. In other words, the “pill” advocates used the two ends of marriage as well; however, they claimed that by controlling the procreative end, one would find peace in the unitive end. This would be a good time for couples. Finally, they would be able to enjoy each other more without the burden of children. The sexual revolution was gaining ground everywhere, and the proud boast of a student sodality publication from Chicago was “It isn’t easy to be a Catholic.”¹² Sex was no longer for procreation but for pleasure, and the consequences would soon be a demographic crisis, abortion, child abuse, poverty, abandonment of the elderly, euthanasia, divorce, broken homes, and huge marriage stress. It was exactly the opposite of what was promised. One could go so far as to say that since it could not have been devised better, the demons must have concocted it all.

Blessed Pope Paul VI had predicted that there would be 1) an increase in infidelity, 2) a general lowering of morality, 3) a loss of respect for and objectification of women, and 4) governments would coerce their populations to use contraception if they felt its use furthered the “good of the

⁹ Gen. 1, 28.

¹⁰ Gen. 2, 24.

¹¹ Pope Pius XI, *Casti Connubii*, 54.

¹² Cf. Leslie Woodcock Tentler, *Catholics and Contraception: An American History* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004), pp. 173-203.

state.”¹³ These are the results we see today. It is interesting also to note that Pope Leo XIII’s concern for government interference in marriage has now practically come to its zenith. In an article in *U.S. News and World Report* the anthropologist Lionel Tiger recognizes what Pope Paul VI predicted in 1968.¹⁴ Widespread use of birth control indeed has had disastrous consequences on our society. Author of the famous book *The Decline of Males*, Lionel Tiger talks about the impoverishment of women, marginalization of men, soaring numbers of abortions and out-of-wedlock births, and a general worsening of relationships between men and women. This decline, argues Tiger, happened because of the massive use of the birth control pill. The problems we are seeing are really worrisome. The “pill” has halted the so-called population explosion in many developed countries and is causing many economic and cultural problems. In fact, the developed countries may soon be so-called third-world countries. All of the initiatives governments in Spain and France are offering for couples to have children do not have a large impact because once the mentality of contraception seeps into the recesses of society, it is very difficult—almost impossible—to change it with government programs. Contraception has not had the same success in ending unwanted pregnancies and the resulting abortions. For example, In 2011, 1.06 million abortions were performed in the United States alone, down 13% from 1.21 million in 2008. In each year, there were four million births. From 1973 through 2011, nearly 53 million legal abortions occurred.¹⁵ That means that more than twenty-five per cent of the children conceived in the USA died at the hands of abortionists, and this number was down from the 1.6 million abortions in 1991, a decrease of twenty-five percent. While the decrease was dramatic according to this study by the Alan Guttmacher Institute, a Planned Parenthood and abortion advocate, one must realize that the numbers of abortions in America still amount to 100,000 per month, approximately 3,300 per day. Such loss of life each day is like the number of lives lost on September 11, 2001. Imagine experiencing that same event every day with no end in sight! This does not take into consideration the fact that the IUD (Itrauterine Device or coil) and almost all forms of commercially available contraceptive pills are abortifacient, so the numbers are certainly higher. These mind-boggling statistics are causing some Evangelical Protestants to re-think their easy acceptance of the “pill.” Clearly there is a relation between the contraceptive mentality and abortion.

Back when the “pill” came out, however, with so many apparent advantages, there was enormous pressure to change Church teaching. The same old lies were spread. We must enter the modern era and accept this new technology as a true blessing from God. While one could see this with improved transportation technology that facilitated one’s movement, one could not apply the same mentality to marriage. Technology only facilitates the achievement of one’s end; it does not change the end. Since the procreative end is the *proprium* of what belongs to marriage and no

¹³ Cf. Blessed Pope Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae* 17.

¹⁴ *U.S. News and World Report*, July 1, 1996, p. 57. Cited in Fr. Phil Bloom, “Birth Control: Negative Consequences of the Pill and Positive Benefits of Fertility Appreciation,” *B.C. Catholic*, Seattle WA, September 1996 (with revisions March 1998).

¹⁵ https://www.guttmacher.org/pubs/fb_induced_abortion.html, accessed 9/8/2015.

other union, when this end is questioned, the marriage institution itself—and society thereafter—begins its slide down the slippery slope that we are witnessing before our very eyes today. For example, it was soon after *Humanae Vitae* that we had *Roe vs. Wade* (1973); in fact, it was only five years thereafter. In some ways *Humanae Vitae* was novel in that it placed the unitive end of marriage at par with the procreative end.¹⁶ Notwithstanding this novelty, what Blessed Pope Paul VI had foreseen was not that far ahead. A Pandora's box had been opened where human life is devalued, cheapened, and even redefined, much like Aldous Huxley had written in his novel *Brave New World*. In this deterministic world in which people are fit to size when in their embryonic phase, there are strict class structures which basically enslave everyone. For instance, we read what Mr. Foster says towards the beginning of the novel:

“We also predestine and condition. We decant our babies as socialized human beings, as Alphas or Epsilons, as future sewage workers or future .” He was going to say “future World controllers,” but correcting himself, said “future Directors of Hatcheries,” instead.¹⁷

C.S. Lewis' *The Abolition of Man* also foresaw the gradual coarsening of societal ethics to the point where the person is degraded and cheapened beyond recognition. According to Lewis, each individual is made up of his head (the intellect), his chest (the spirit or heart where natural law is engraved and receptive to being formed as is needed in the conscience), and his stomach (the good and bad instinctive desires). Without the chest, the head has uncontrolled power over the stomach. There is no conscience in between the two. So, society would be governed by “men without chests,” and vices once prohibited by the mores of society—such as abortion, homosexuality, euthanasia, etc.—would become commonplace because the chest would no longer exist to inhibit the lusts of the stomach.¹⁸ Lewis shows that everyone is, in effect, a victim to this new system, even the so-called controllers. As man seeks to conquest nature, which is what applied science has as an end, he has to consider that each new power won by man is also a power over man. Those who throw bombs can also be bombed, like those who control births have their own births controlled as well. With the power of eugenics, after all, comes the result that the fruits of eugenics are the patients of the very same power that produced them. So, the human race becomes not only “the general who triumphs” over nature but “also the prisoner who follows the triumphal car.” In other words, Man's conquest of nature will have brought about nature's conquest of man, i.e. the abolition of man.¹⁹

¹⁶ Cf. *Humanae Vitae* 12.

¹⁷ Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World* (New York: Harper Perennial Classics Edition, 2006), p. 11.

¹⁸ Cf. C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York: Harper Collins, 2001), Chapter 1.

¹⁹ Cf. C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York: Harper Collins, 2001), Chapter 3.

The Ends of Marriage: Procreative and Unitive

With the issue of ends in mind, it has always seemed obvious to me that the primary end of marriage is procreative. I have only to consider the recent June 26, 2015 ruling by the Supreme Court on so-called “homosexual marriage.” We read in a *Catholic World News* article from the day: “Claiming that the institution of marriage has ‘evolved over time,’ Justice Kennedy wrote that the essence of the marital bond is a sharing of intimacy, which does not require partners of opposite sexes. He argued that the plaintiffs in the *Obergefell* case were not undermining the institution of marriage, but showing their respect for that institution by seeking to participate in it. The majority opinion reasoned that the ability to marry would help to stabilize same-sex unions, and benefit the children raised by homosexual partners. Justice Kennedy explicitly rejected the notion that marriage is intrinsically oriented to procreation, writing: “An ability, desire, or promise to procreate is not and has not been a prerequisite for a valid marriage in any state.”²⁰ With the stress on the end or good of union, we are seeing these sorts of results, so it only confirms me in stressing the procreative end as the *proprium* of marriage.

At the same time, *Fredrik deBoer* writes: “the notion that procreation and child-rearing are the natural justification for marriage has been dealt a terminal injury. We don’t, after all, ban marriage for those who can’t conceive, or annul marriages that don’t result in children, or make couples pinkie swear that they’ll have kids not too long after they get married. We have insisted instead that the institution exists to enshrine in law a special kind of long-term commitment, and to extend certain essential logistical and legal benefits to those who make that commitment.”²¹ Even if there are clearly these exceptions, as in cases of infertility, that still does not eliminate procreation as a primary end. I see how difficult it is for couples who are infertile, in fact. Naturally, one gets married to form a family.

To sum it up, we have to prioritize the procreative end of marriage because it is the distinctive, proper and privative end of marriage. It does not exist in any other kind of human union, and it belongs to the very nature of marriage itself. At the same time, the unitive end of marriage is very important because it is willed by God and because parents cannot be good educators of their children if they are not properly united. Eliminating this end and stressing only the procreative end would, in effect, lead to what we see with In-Vitro Fertilization, i.e. a detachment from the naturally unifying act of procreation. Both ends mysteriously come together in marriage. You will notice that I am not saying this merely because the Church teaches this truth. Even if we as faithful believe Mother Church’s teaching, our reasons for doing so are also substantiated by natural law. We do not simply adhere to a teaching in a nominalist sort of way. We adhere to a teaching because of its compelling truth, a truth which the Church naturally defends. Notwithstanding what I say about the procreative end having priority over the unitive end, the issue remains that the procreative end cannot be artificially interrupted and that the unitive end is

²⁰ *Catholic World News*, June 26, 2015.

²¹ Fredrik deBoer, “It’s time to legalize polygamy,” *PoliticoMagazine*, June 26, 2015.

like a context of sorts for the procreative end. The question is about the finality of an act, and one cannot use a technological-medical means to determine that end.

Natural Family Planning Method

With all this to consider, why would the Church endorse the Natural Planning Method? This endorsement is especially strong in the USA. All we have to see is how between the 19th and the 25th of July of this year, the USCCB endorsed the “National NFP awareness week,” subtitled “Good for the body. Great for the soul.” This coincides with 25th of July of 1968 when *Humanae Vitae* was published and the date preceding the Feast of Sts. Joachim and Anna. Such a date is clearly not a coincidence. However, does not Natural Family Planning and Pope Paul VI’s “responsible parenthood”²² seem contradictory to the natural end of marriage? While it may seem contradictory to the procreative end of marriage, is it not also contradictory to the procreative end of the sexual act? Could it just be a happy Catholic solution to the birth control pill?

Humanae Vitae 10 stresses two main points: 1) to be generous with God, each other, and society, and 2) to be responsible if serious²³ circumstances lead one to have fewer children. These circumstances can be of an economic or medical nature. Notice how Pope Paul VI does not mention NFP explicitly but lays down the principles of responsible parenthood. In other words, NFP is not the normal means for a couple but rather an instrument in given circumstances, and there is an imprecise area which allows a couple to make a prudential decision. In terms of economic reasons, however, we cannot compare a couple in a so-called Third-World country with water problems to a couple in a so-called First-World country having trouble with a third car. We cannot compare a couple with one of the parents facing severe financial drawbacks to a couple with parents who can afford to help out. It is a question of a prudential judgment. This applies also to health issues. While there may certainly be physical health issues such as the need for the woman to space the children, there can also be psychological health issues of a woman who cannot cope with more than four children. What is prudence if not the discernment of one’s good in every circumstance, choosing the proper means of achieving the good desired?²⁴ It is “right reason in action,” as St. Thomas writes.²⁵ I believe that NFP falls into the category of instruments used to act prudently in the formation of a couple’s family, fulfilling each spouse’s duties as a responsible parent so as to have as many children as God asks in given circumstances.

²² Cf. Blessed Pope Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae* 10.

²³ We read in *Humanae Vitae* 10: “With regard to physical, economic, psychological and social conditions, responsible parenthood is exercised by those who prudently and generously decide to have more children, and by those who, for serious reasons and with due respect to moral precepts, decide not to have additional children for either a certain or an indefinite period of time.”

²⁴ CCC 1806.

²⁵ *ST* II-II q. 47, a. 2.

NFP in Context

It is also important to contextualize the Church's historical sponsoring of NFP. The Billings Method begins in 1953 in Melbourne, Australia. While the Billings family was a happy, large Australian Catholic family not suffering from poverty, there were other Catholic families struggling to get by, so they provided a natural method to answer the need. As many of us know, it follows the natural cycle of the woman. The woman following the method knows when she is fertile and when she is not. It turned out that this was very much a pro-woman method because the woman could help decide when to abstain and when not to do so. Many men reacted badly to this because they did not want to be told when to abstain and when not to do so. The "pill" that came out around the same time seemed much more attractive, eliminating all such problems. With the Billings Method, instead, sacrifices are made, and the attitude is not one of preventing conception. Rather the attitude is one of supplying information so as to be able to make proper choices. This ennobles people to make choices toward what is truly good for them. The intimacy couples share can only logically increase if there is dialogue and a deepening understanding of their combined fertility. As experience shows, the closest sexual union only occurs where genital sex does not begin the love story. To become one, leaving one's parents and cleaving to one's spouse, requires communication not only of words and sex but of true love and sacrifice for the other, a love that is most explicitly learned in Christ. In this sense, the procreative end of marriage is nourished and simultaneously nourishes the unitive end of marriage. So, as we see how this method in the past was used to help regulate the number of births but how now it is used to help women with fertility problems, we see that it has much more to do with love than it does with a simple technical method that measures when one is fertile or when one is not.

For this reason, we are warned by people in the field not to make the Billings Method and other NFP models a panacea as people pushing contraception would like to do for the contraceptives they sell. There are many articles out there that sell it as a means to fix people's marriage. According to a number of people with whom I spoke who work in the promotion of NFP in several dioceses in the USA it appears that most of these articles point to incomplete or misleading data. Repeatedly I would hear that while many quote divorce rate percentages associated with NFP, these numbers do not come from reliable sources. What they have seen is that NFP will not, in and of itself, strengthen marriage. In fact, many couples who approach NFP without generosity, still focused on sexual-fulfillment, will find that NFP can cause even more fights over sexuality and embitter couples against one another. If they approach NFP generously, they will find that it can empower women and strengthen families. It does this by shifting the conversation, placing the responsibility for family planning decisions on both husband and wife. The woman is no longer solely responsible for fertility (taking a pill at the right time). She is empowered by knowing her body, and this knowledge helps her to participate fully in the decision to have children or not.

A Proper Approach to NFP

Unless one approaches NFP with a pro-life mentality and openness to the cross it will not work. In fact, it is better for us priests to focus first on suffering and the cross, or on the family and

community, before talking about fertility. With a strong moral and Faith-centered foundation, it is easier for a couple to approach intimacy within a Catholic framework. This is a real Catholic pastoral approach. For example, to show how lust in all of its forms is violent at its very core would help people to reason and appreciate chastity and continence.²⁶ NFP cannot be seen as the alternative to contraception. Sometimes, according to these sources, it appears as the natural method that the Church must deliver in order not to cave in her teaching. Shortly after the Second Vatican Council, around the time when the “pill” was gaining ground and Pope Paul VI published *Humanae Vitae*, the Church wanted to offer an alternative to contraception for people. In many ways NFP is an alternative. In other ways, it is not. The capability we have to measure fertility today has increased very much since the beginning of the Billings Method. What happens, however, is that the cycles alternate in a woman. After she has a child, the time between one ovulation and the next can vary dramatically, so this could mean that the husband might be asked to abstain for quite a while, sometimes between one or two years. My sources stress that the man, for instance, has to abstain during the pregnancy and up to a year after it, depending on the regularity of the cycles. At times this delay is also because of the way a woman feels due to hormonal flux or due to the fact that she cannot handle getting pregnant again after the fourth child in five years. For some men this can be quite difficult, so negative consequences can emerge such as masturbation, pornography, or prostitution. It is for this reason that once a couple goes into NFP, each spouse needs to know of the abstinence that will be required and that each spouse be ready to carry the cross involved. Basically, the mindset needs to be one that is open to life, or else it can fail miserably as a delusion. This shows that while H.V. 10 admitted the need for such an alternative to contraception, life indicates that we cannot rush to say that NFP is the panacea to all our problems. Sometimes, in fact, it is advertised as completely effective with results suspiciously similar to those tied to the pill.

One of my sources, Ben Fisher from Tyler, Texas, compares a family in 1900 to a family in 2015 in the USA. Both tend to have three to four children within the first decade of marriage. The difference arises when the couple reaches its mid-thirties. This is the time when a couple in 2015 goes into some sort of crisis, financial or other. There is therefore pressure for a woman to have a hysterectomy at an earlier age. Also, to be considered here is that doctors protect themselves from risks which they find more easily now than in 1900. In terms of preventive methods, it is much more probable now that a mother may come to know about a heart problem in her child than it was in 1900. The only problem is that this heart problem could sometimes resolve itself naturally, but the doctor would not want to take any risks and could even counsel an abortion. Mr. Fisher explains that in 2015 there are three types of families: 1) contraceptive families that have 2-3 children in fifteen years, 2) NFP families that have 5-7 children in ten years, and 3) NFP families in crisis that have 3-4 children in fifteen years of marriage. Fisher claims that once we eliminate the crisis aspect, we discover that the fertility rate is similar to that of a century ago.

Fisher stresses that NFP was “made to order” by the Bishops in the 1970s and that the Billings Method is designed for Third-World parents without doctors. In his critique he emphasizes the

²⁶ Such a good demonstration can be seen in Fr. Vincent P. Miceli, SJ, *The Roots of Violence* (Hanover, MA: Christopher Publishing, 1989), pp. 59-75. In this fifth chapter Miceli talks about the violence of lust.

breakdown of the family, so he basically shows the magisterial connection we are showing between Popes Leo XIII, Pius XI, and Paul VI. He goes further to explain that there is a breakdown in the extended family, not just the nuclear family. The extended family works on fertility; it does not see conception as a failure. The connection is clear: if for extended family procreation is key, then its breakdown will also result in the breakdown of the link between fertility and marriage. In an illuminating article by John A. Cuddeback, “A Father’s Presence in the Home,” we read how the main problem today stems from moving the center of work from the household to the outside, a phenomenon that began with the industrial revolution. Cuddeback writes:

This change—the demise of the household as a center of production—is one that many defenders of the traditional family either dismiss with a shrug, or even approve with a nod in the direction of “economic progress.” Yet I think it is clear that, regardless of an admixture of genuine advantages, this shift was a blow to the very essence of the household community as, in Aristotle’s words, “constituted by nature for everyday life.” Why? Work, especially in the sense of the production of things necessary for human life, is the very stuff of daily human life. Though not the most noble or important activity done in the household, it is naturally the skeleton around which other activities spring—be they meals, prayer, study, leisure, or play.²⁷

These are at the root of the many problems we face. The very structure of society has changed very dramatically. Many people feel overwhelmed when they are alone without the support of an extended family that would have been more common years ago. What does a woman do when she is all alone with the children in a condominium? Different health concerns emerge such as depression and fatigue which were less common a century ago. Fisher’s indications, however, are not meant to underestimate what is good about NFP but rather to take an honest look at all of the factors involved. His contention is that we cannot have a “social norming” which silences those outside the norm of NFP, such as families that really have health and fertility problems. We have to be honest. We have to have licit information-gathering methods. All in all, we have to see the sacrificial aspects of life which the Church, her Founder, her history, and her saints have shown. Just as we see that honest attempts to resolve the AIDS contagion involve behavioral changes that entail willing virtue and not vice, we see this in all areas of sexual conduct. Everyone is called to chastity, and this virtue is practiced in variance from epoch to epoch as it is from couple to couple. The important thing is to practice the virtue of chastity and the continence which that requires. We cannot see sex as an instrument of personal pleasure but as much, much more.

Contraception Health Risks

However, if people should think of the easy way out that appears to be offered by contraception rather than chastity, it is important to remind them of its negative health effects. There is always a cross involved. It is a question of which one to choose, i.e. which one is the cross Our Lord

²⁷ <http://www.getprinciples.com/a-fathers-presence-in-the-home/>, accessed 9/8/2015.

wills for us. The fact that there is a cross involved makes it important to remember that there are countless studies published in medical journals that indicate unwanted effects of contraception. Breast cancer risks are elevated for oral contraceptive users and for those who undergo abortions.²⁸ Synthetic estrogen, in fact, is identified as a class 1 carcinogen like cigarettes or asbestos. Stroke risk is also much higher, not to mention the increased blood clots.²⁹ No husband in his right mind would ask his wife to take such toxins that indeed risk her very life. With all of this in mind, it is clear that a natural route is logically more easily recommended than a contraceptive route. In fact, the Creighton University Model of fertility has not only helped women be more fertile but has helped identify signs of underlying or previously untreated conditions, helping to improve women's lives by their diagnosis and treatment.³⁰ In addition to the removal of "biological toxins" from a couple's life, a natural approach to procreation also helps create more intimacy between a couple. After all, contraception is like a "protection" of each spouse from the other. Such an approach belies the very sexual act itself. Instead, when husband and wife really believe in God and in each other and can communicate with patience and love about their sexuality, peace and harmony reign.

At the same time, Ben Fisher played the Devil's Advocate with me when he said that he would not use such health risks as evidence against the use of contraception or abortion for those who would not listen to the primary moral argumentation against both contraception and abortion. The reason why is that he claimed that there could be technological improvements in the future that would make such arguments obsolete. I then posed this problem to Denise Mountenay of *Canada Silent No More* during a meeting at the Vatican, and she explained that such technological "improvements" are impossible. She showed me studies which demonstrate how estrogen, the most potent stimulator of breast cell growth, increases with pregnancy, therefore helping the breasts reach their full development and potential.³¹ Estrogen stimulates the undifferentiated cells in the breasts to proliferate so that there will be enough milk-producing tissue to feed the baby after birth. Only the undifferentiated cells are vulnerable to carcinogens and can ultimately grow into cancer cells. Mountenay explained that it is important to see that in the last eight weeks of pregnancy, other hormones differentiate these cells into milk-producing cells. In the process, the growth potential—and cancer-forming potential—of these cells is turned off. That is why a full-term pregnancy lowers the risk of breast cancer later in life.

²⁸ Cf. Breast Cancer Prevention Institute, www.bcpinstitute.org. Here you will find 41 studies that show the connection between breast cancer and both contraception and abortion, accessed 9/8/2015.

²⁹ Cf. <http://www.cancer.gov/about-cancer/causes-prevention/risk/hormones/oral-contraceptives-fact-sheet>, accessed 9/8/2015. Also, cf. <http://envirocancer.cornell.edu/factsheet/general/fs10.estrogen.cfm>, accessed 9/8/2015.

³⁰ Cf. <http://www.creightonmodel.com/>, accessed 9/8/2015.

³¹ Cf. <http://canadasilentnomore.com/>, accessed 9/8/2015.

Concluding Thoughts:

Natural Family Planning, Human Sexuality, and Stronger Families

Tied to a virtuous, grace-filled life, NFP can therefore certainly strengthen a family because it removes the biological and spiritual toxins out of a couple's sex-life. It gives the couple a healthy framework from which to develop intimacy and as a way to confront new issues, such as infertility. All of that is quite different in couples who use artificial birth control. How often do we hear of couples who have been using the "pill" for a period of time and then stop using it to try to have children only to find that they now have infertility problems? This needs to be known. We need to be proponents of what comes naturally. We need to show how women have much more to gain from the formation of healthy families which begin when they are young and vibrant. I personally encourage women not to wait to have their first child. After all, studies show that the longer a woman waits, the more difficult it is to have a child.³²

Why do we need to be proponents of NFP? Clearly, we need to be so not only because it is natural (and as a consequence willed by the Author of nature) but because it is a healthy alternative to what is in vogue due to pharmaceutical companies selling the "pill." As always, money is involved. Proponents of the "pill" have a vested interest in selling their product. In addition to some of the angry men who would attack NFP at its origins, these proponents of artificial birth control have been ridiculing natural methods proposed by the Church for many years now. They laugh at the calendars, the temperature taking, and abstinence of all sorts, calling them "Vatican Roulette" and referring to Catholic babies as "rhythm babies." This has made it difficult to make advances in NFP for the Church. Nonetheless, it is also clear that such methods do not interfere with the natural cycles of women the way that artificial birth control does. Since they do not interfere with the natural cycles of a woman, and infertility is therefore less of a risk. It is also clear that NFP certainly is not tied to the increased risk of cancer that women face with artificial birth control. Finally, added to a virtuous, grace-filled context, one sees that the relationship between man and woman benefits more from such a natural approach than from an artificial approach. As Timothy Putnam of *NFP Aware* in Oklahoma explains, it is intimacy itself—and vulnerability with one's spouse—that actually strengthens the family. This may be achieved either with virtuous continence or generous and deliberate self-gift. In this sense, NFP is a valuable tool that must be accompanied with good communication skills and intentional openness to one's spouse in intimacy and vulnerability to strengthen the family.

All this makes us consider what human sexuality itself is all about. If human sexuality is merely physiological, then it has meaning only in terms of the immediate effect on the individual. With this sort of approach, it is clear that NFP cannot have a sustaining influence. It is at the basis of a very egoistical way of looking at the sexual act. As Fr. Paul M. Quay, SJ writes, "At this level of understanding, sexual activity has no meaning or value save individual pleasure, and it becomes impossible to distinguish fornication or adultery from the chaste coition of saints, or even to

³² For instance, read David B. Dunson, Donna D. Baird, Bernardo Colombo, "Increased Infertility With Age in Men and Women," in *Obstetrics and Gynecology*, February 2004.

divide natural intercourse from masturbation or bestiality.”³³ Clearly, the sexual act is more than just a physiological phenomenon or fact. While it is the foundation for the sexual act as a procreative act, common to person and brute alike, Quay argues that we must look at the sexual act in the context of *human* sexuality, “a sexuality penetrated, modified, and elevated by human rationality and distinctively human emotions.”³⁴ At the same time, Quay continues, how can the essentially individualistic character of sense pleasure “be at once source and sign and consummation of a lofty spiritual love?”³⁵ While there are cultures that identify coition with male gratification and the begetting of children for family or clan with nothing beyond, we can also say that the mutual, sexually-based love that naturally draws man and woman together—along with the sexual complementarity and companionship that is a dominant motivation for marriage—is the fundamental unitive end which we addressed above. While the ordination to children is taken for granted, the whole of human sexuality is biologically and otherwise meaningless except in terms of procreation.

Procreation is the *proprium* of sex, but in human sexuality we see the unitive end being part of the mystery that envelops human nature itself, and it is in this mystery that NFP enters the equation. This mystery deals with the very nature of human morality itself. For this reason, NFP cannot be compared to contraception because it would be like comparing a healthy diet to bulimia. The healthy eater uses her freedom and self-control to choose wisely what she eats, while one suffering from bulimia acts from a corrupt notion of freedom that seeks to escape the consequences of her choices. The bulimic separates the good of the taste of food from its nutritional end. The taste in this analogy can be compared to the unitive end of sex, whereas the nutritional end can be compared to the procreative end of sex. Both contraception and bulimia are very unhealthy physically and spiritually. They are unhealthy spiritually because they represent an abuse of freedom based on the desire to have the good “taste” without the consequences. How can one expect to grow in love of his or her spouse with such a mentality? Like the common sense idea that too much of a good thing is bad, the virtue of temperance reminds us that we should not overdo a good thing. Everything has its proper place and order. Approached with such a mentality, NFP can therefore be seen as a means to strengthen families. There is something more profound that is seen very frequently where NFP is used with the proper disposition which Faith provides: respect for woman. This could sum up the whole purpose of fertility appreciation. Respect for woman is what our society lacks and desperately needs to recover. Respect for woman, for her fertility, can transform our personal lives, our marriages, our society—and our Church.

A propos the respect for women, Pope Leo XIII reminds us in *Arcanum divinae sapientiae* how prior to the coming of Christ, the situation had come to an all-time low with governments

³³ Paul M. Quay, SJ “Contraception and Conjugal Love” in *Why Humanae Vitae was right*, edited by Janet Smith (San Francisco: Ignatius Press), p. 25.

³⁴ *Ibid*, p. 26.

³⁵ *Ibid*, p. 27.

meddling in what is one of the most sacred institutions God made, and that chaos and confusion in marriage came at a great cost for women. As the union of man and woman

“might answer more fittingly to the infinite wise counsels of God,” it “... manifested chiefly two most excellent properties - deeply sealed, as it were, and signed upon it-namely, unity and perpetuity.”³⁶

However, “...plurality of wives and husbands, as well as divorce, caused the nuptial bond to be relaxed exceedingly. Hence, too, sprang up the greatest confusion as to the mutual rights and duties of husbands and wives, inasmuch as a man assumed right of dominion over his wife, ordering her to go about her business, often without any just cause; while he was himself at liberty “to run headlong with impunity into lust, unbridled and unrestrained, in houses of ill-fame and amongst his female slaves, as if the dignity of the persons sinned with, and not the will of the sinner, made the guilt.”³⁷ When the licentiousness of a husband thus showed itself, nothing could be more piteous than the wife, sunk so low as to be all but reckoned as a means for the gratification of passion, or for the production of offspring.³⁸

Pope Leo XIII goes on to show how Christ and His Church came to save marriage, woman, and mankind in general. It is clear that by respecting God and His Law, an eternal and divine law, everything else flows in due course. Thus, if we look at a method that helps families live the responsible parenthood Pope Paul VI talks about in *Humanae Vitae*, we cannot help but look at it with a holistic view of marriage, society, man and God in mind. If we look at NFP as a panacea that will solve all problems, then we are approaching it the way the promoters of contraception or psychoanalysts approach their paradigms: solely in terms of sexuality. Pope Pius XII explained in 1954 in his encyclical *Sacra Virginitas*, “It is against common sense, which the Church always holds in esteem, to consider the sexual instinct as the most important and the deepest of human tendencies, and to conclude from this that man cannot restrain it for his whole life without danger to his vital nervous system, and consequently without injuring the harmony of his personality.”³⁹ This shows us that before we give sexual issues too much importance, we must look at other key issues, just as I have tried to do in this paper by beginning with a focus on the family before ever addressing NFP and other related issues. That being said, NFP methods—coupled with a good sense of the Faith—are much more suited to strengthening families than quick contraceptive shortcuts which have truly proven the magisterial foresight of the papacy in the last 135 years.

³⁶ Pope Leo XII, Encyclical *Arcanum divinae sapientiae*, 5.

³⁷ St. Jerome, *Epist.* 77, 3 (*PL* 22, 691).

³⁸ Pope Leo XIII, Encyclical *Arcanum*, 7.

³⁹ Pope Pius XII, Encyclical *Sacra Virginitas*, 33, Rome, March 25, 1954.