

# The Sacrament of Matrimony



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# **A Scriptural Guide to Marriage**

## **The Purpose of Marriage: Union (Love) and Procreation (Life)**

... Male and female he created them. And God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it ..." Then the LORD God said, "it is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him." So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh; and the rib which the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man." Then the man said, "This at last is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh, she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man." Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh. (Gen. 1:27, 28, 2:18-24) (1 Tim 5:14)

## **Children are a Blessing**

Lo, sons are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the sons of one's youth. Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them! He shall not be put to shame when he speaks with his enemies in the gate. (Psalm 127:3-5)

Then children were brought to Him that He might lay His hands on them and pray. The disciples rebuked the people; but Jesus said, "Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven." And He laid His hands on them and went away. (Matthew 19:13-15)

Jacob's anger was kindled against Rachel, and he said, "Am I in the place of God, who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?" (Gen. 30:2) (See Also: Gen. 4:1, 25, 5:29, 17:16, 29:32-35, 30:1, 6, Prov. 17:6, Psalm 128)

## **Contraception is a Sin against Marriage**

So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife; and he went in to her, and the LORD gave her conception, and she bore a son. (Ruth 4:13)

Then Judah said to Onan, "Go in to your brother's wife, and perform the duty of a brother-in-law to her, and raise up offspring for your brother." But Onan knew that the offspring would not be his; so when he went in to his brother's wife he spilled the semen on the ground, lest he should give offspring to his brother. And what he did was displeasing in the sight of the LORD, and he slew him also. (Gen. 38:8-10) Note\* God slew Onan for contraception, not because he refused to raise a child for his brother, since the punishment for this is much less than death in Deut. 25:5-10.

## **The Indissolubility of Marriage**

And this again you do. You cover the Lord's altar with tears, with weeping and groaning because he no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor at your hand. You ask, "Why does he not?" Because the LORD was witness to the covenant between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant. Has not the one God made and sustained for us the spirit of life? And what does he desire? Godly offspring. So take heed to yourselves, and let none be faithless to the wife of his youth. For I hate divorce, says the LORD the God of Israel, and covering one's garment with violence, says the LORD of hosts. So take heed to yourselves and do not be faithless. (Malachi 2:13-16)

And Pharisees came up and in order to test Him asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" He answered them, "what did Moses command you?" They said, "Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of divorce, and to put her away." But Jesus said to them, "for your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment. But from the beginning of creation, God made them male and female. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder." And in the house, the disciples asked Him again about this matter. And He said to them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another, commits adultery against her; and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery." (Mark 10:2-12)

To the married I give charge, not I but the Lord, that the wife should not separate from her husband (but if she does, let her remain single or else be reconciled to her husband) – and that the husband should not divorce his wife. (1 Cor. 7:10, 11; See Also: 1 Cor. 7:39, Rom. 7:1-3)

## **The Obligations of Marriage**

But because of the temptation to immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. For the wife does not rule over her own body, but the husband does; likewise the husband does not rule over his own body, but the wife does. Do not refuse one another except perhaps by agreement for a season, that you may devote yourselves to prayer, but then come together again, lest Satan tempt you through lack of self-control. (1 Cor. 7:2-5)

Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. As the church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave

himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. Even so husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife, loves himself. For no man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This mystery is a profound one, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church; however, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband. (Eph. 5:22-33. See Also: 1 Cor. 7:27-38/Col. 3:18)

### **The Blessings of a Good Wife**

House and wealth are inherited from fathers, but a prudent wife is from the LORD. (Prov. 19:14, 18:22)

A good wife who can find? She is far more precious than jewels. The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain. She does him good, and not harm, all the days of her life ... Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised. (Prov. 31)

### **The Husband is Blessed Through His Wife**

Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth, a lovely hind, a graceful doe. Let her affection fill you at all times with delight, be infatuated always with her love. (Prov. 5:15-19)

Enjoy life with the wife whom you love, all the days of your vain life which He has given you under the sun, because that is your portion in life and in your toil at which you toil under the sun. (Eccl. 9:9, Deut. 24:5, 1 Peter 3:7)

### **The Believing Spouse Sanctifies the Unbelieving**

For the unbelieving husband is consecrated through his wife ... (1 Cor. 7:14-16)

### **Fornication (Pre-marital Sex) is a Sin against Purity and Marriage**

Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled; for God will judge the fornicators and adulterers. (Hebrews 13:4; Also: Eph. 5:5, 6, Gal. 5:16-24, Rev. 22:14, 15, 1 Cor. 6:15-20)

**(Written by Rev. H.T. Burke)**

# The Secret to Matrimony

Rev. Eric James Albertson

With the ever increasing divorce rates and the societal misunderstandings of the true nature of matrimony, couples entering into this profound mystery today are exposed to a great risk of future separation. From a strict sociological perspective, divorce is the norm today and fidelity to the marriage vow, “Until death do us part,” is becoming increasingly infrequent. Confronted with this sad reality, the couple preparing for marriage must accept the fact that the odds of success seem to be against them.

Couples today must approach this sacrament very seriously, eager to know what keeps a marriage together, and what tears it apart. They should ask themselves such questions as: “How will we be different?; What are we going to do to make our marriage last the rest of our lives?” If this attitude is adopted, the next move will be to seek the answers, “To whom shall we go, Lord?” (Jn 6:68). There is no time here for lies, false teachings or deception; marriage is just too precious and delicate to expose to the forever changing and dangerous realm of subjective opinion. If it was Christ who raised this union to the dignity of a sacrament, (“... therefore what God has joined together ... Mt 19:6) then it is to Christ we must go for the answer. Jesus said: “I am the truth” (Jn 14:6). We can be certain, therefore, that His answer will be free of error. The truth of Christ is presented today through the Holy Roman Catholic Church which he founded (“... you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church ...” (Mt 16:18) and gave the spirit of truth (“But when He comes, the Spirit of truth, He will guide you to all truth,” Jn 16:13). The Church is the very bride of Christ (Eph 5:25-32) and apart from her we walk in darkness.

What, then, is the secret of matrimony? We must take as our basic premise that this sacrament is the total, absolute, unreserved giving-of-self to the other, sealed by God in the exchange of vows. Essential to this union are its two equal ends of procreative (life-giving, “Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth ...” Gen 1:28) and unitive love (uniting of self to the other physically, mentally and spiritually, “... and the two of them become one body” Gen 2:24; Mk 10:8).

Without its procreative and unitive ends, a marriage is simply not Christian. With them, Christian marriage reaches perfection (“... be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect.” Mt. 5:48). The secret, then, is to see that these two ends are allowed to reach their full potential. This is the challenge before our couples today. The following three areas – Communication, Practice of the Faith and Natural Family Planning – will help them to meet this challenge. Although not a complete treatise on marriage, these principles will help a couple place their marriage on a firm foundation from which to build a happy and holy life together. “Everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on a rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and

the winds blew and buffeted the house. But it did not collapse; it had been set solidly on rock” (Mt 7:24-26).

## COMMUNICATION

Christ teaches us that “the two shall be as one” (Mk 10:8). The giving-of-self to the other is to be complete so that it results in *total* union. The couple mutually give themselves to each other as a gift: the husband becomes the greatest possession of his wife; the wife of her husband. Each treasures the other. Communication is simply the living out of this gift by the sharing of one’s heart, life and mind. It means being able to reveal freely one’s thoughts to the other without fear of rejection, trusting completely in their vow of fidelity. It means the couple has an on-going dialogue. They speak to each other and can have a deep conversation as easily as a light one. There is certainly time for silence in marriage, but those who claim to be the silent type, to the detriment of the relationship, probably should not get married until they learn to express themselves. Conversation in marriage should, after all, be a delight not a burden. Marriage is communication. It is important to express this in dialogue because far too often silence can be interpreted negatively.

Actions speak louder than words and communication involves affection as well. The goodbye kiss in the morning, the hello kiss at night, the celebration of anniversaries, birthdays, graduations, the occasional surprise dinner or flowers, the night out at the show (money spent on a baby-sitter is always money well spent), taking quality time to make love – all these should be present in a marriage. If they are not, then flares should go up and the couple needs to do some serious reflection.

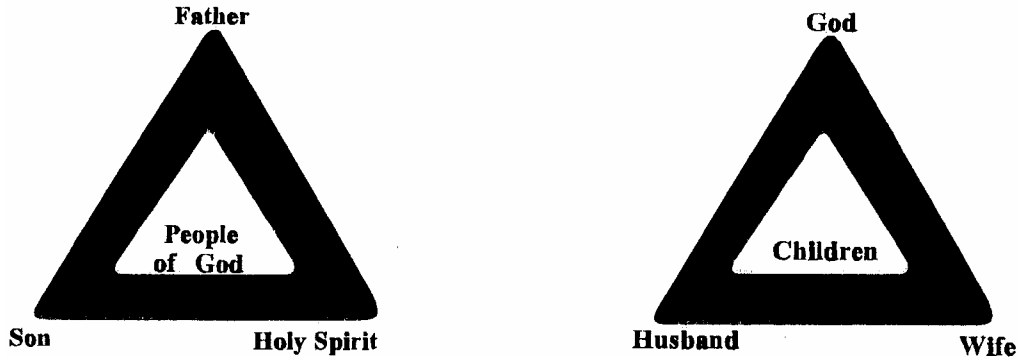
The importance of financial communication should not be overlooked. The couple must realize that the family becomes like a small business. They should know how much money is coming in and going out. Detail here is important. It is tragic that the sole reason for many divorces is failure to have had this financial awareness.

## PRACTICE OF THE FAITH

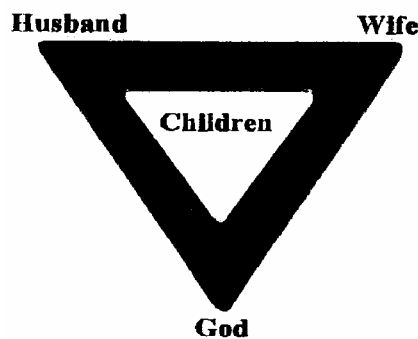
Our Lord’s teaching on the sacrament of matrimony can be summed up in His quote from Mark’s Gospel: “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, no human being must separate” (Mk 10:7-9). In communication we stressed verses seven and eight; here we stress verse nine. God Himself seals this union on the day of the Sacrament and continues to seal it every day of the couple’s married life. He is part of the marriage. It is therefore God who calls, allows and enables the husband and wife to give themselves to each other. This is marriage as a vocation. It would be a grave error for the couple to think that Divine Providence

was absent from their meeting. From all eternity, then, God has planned for them to meet, fall in love, marry and raise a family for His Kingdom. The call to marriage is itself a gift from God. Would it not be a grave offense, then, to neglect the Giver?

Marriage is also a symbol of the Holy Trinity (Father, Son and Holy Spirit): God, husband, wife and children.



This is the theological view, but if we consider the practical, we see the inverse:



Matrimony is based on God and cannot survive without Him. As a couple's relationship is with God, so will their relationship be with each other. To distance themselves from God through neglect of the practice of the Faith would be to distance themselves from each other and from their children. "I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing" (Jn 15:5). "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea" (Mt 18:6).

But the couple who keeps the Faith will rapidly reach the depths of matrimony; "... but whoever drinks the water I shall give shall never thirst; the water I shall give will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life" (Jn 4:14). The burdens and trials of this life will seem light to them. They will handle difficulties with ease and their marriage will be truly happy, their love deep. For it is Christ who will teach them how to love, as He Himself is loved and loves the Father who is Love ("... for God is love" 1 Jn 4:8) and gives love ("For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son ..." Jn 3:16). Their love, then, transcends the love of the world and they enter into the mystery of Infinite Love. This is the love that grows stronger year after year and binds a family together. So powerful is this love, that a couple could live to be a thousand years old, their love would still continue to grow stronger and stronger. The generous gift of God is that the couple, through Christ, through whom all things are possible (Lk 18:27), can reach the depth of a thousand years of love in this short life span on earth. As a prelude to eternal life, the couple receives a foretaste of the communion of saints in the glory of Heaven where we will all be one with Christ (Mt 22:23-33; Jn 17:20-24; 1 Thes 4:13-18).

In practice, this basically means frequent reception of the sacraments and prayer. Sunday Mass must be given its proper importance, as well as confession. The family that prays together stays together. The rosary should be a part of family prayer. A decade can be prayed together after dinner, or perhaps the whole rosary daily or once a week. Short Scripture passages can be read and explained to the children before they go to bed. Parents can also bless their children by making the Sign of the Cross on their foreheads as they did at their Baptism. This is usually done at bedtime and is a great tradition that will be remembered into adult life. Sacred images (statues, holy pictures, crucifixes) and holy water should be in the home. Couples should subscribe to some solid periodical or magazine on Christian marriage and family life so as to keep up on the Church, the Faith and the vocation of matrimony. Husband and wife should make some time to pray together every day invoking God for His protection, blessings and continued guidance. "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you" (James 4:8).

### NATURAL FAMILY PLANNING (NFP)

"For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.' So they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, no human being shall separate" (Mk 10:7-9). Here we consider the passage of Our Lord in its entirety. When a married couple engage in sexual intercourse they participate in the greatest expression of matrimonial love. As in the end of marriage itself, so too in this ultimate expression, there exists the essential ends of unitive and procreative love. Unitive, because in sexual union a couple engage in the most intimate expression possible. So close is this intimacy that Scripture teaches that after this union, one "knows" the other (Lk 1:34). God unites the couple with this

knowledge. He is the binding force who sustains and confirms their love. Procreative, because it is here that new life begins. God joins the couple together each time they enter into the sexual union. It is here and here alone that God, who is the Giver of Life, allows mankind to share in His creative power. They will work together: the couple to share in the creation of the body; God to infuse the eternal soul entrusted to their care and guidance.

Thus we see the exalted dignity inherent to the sexual union. It is truly a supernatural bond, a sacred act. All the more reason why we must approach it with reverence and respect. Far from having an antiquated view of sexuality, the Church has the true understanding of this great mystery. It is the world that falls short and suffers because it seeks to reduce this union to something that was not intended by God. How is it reduced? Simply by removing one or both of the ends. Prostitution is a reduction. There is no procreative or unitive dimension there, or at least none intended. Homosexuality, rape, pre-marital sex, masturbation, oral sex – all are reductions because they lack the unitive and procreative ends. Conjugal love between a husband and wife is a sacred action, an expression of their love covenant with each other, and any reduction is sacrilegious and therefore sinful.

So close are these ends that one cannot exist without the other, or inversely, if one is missing both are missing. And it is possible for them to be lacking even within the context of marriage if each and every act of sexual intercourse is not an act of unitive and procreative love. Artificial birth control is the most popular form of reduction. Consider the pill, for example, which is 98 percent effective. Can a couple honestly say they are open to life when the woman has only a two percent chance of conception? Would not that be like inviting someone into a room when the door can only open a quarter of an inch? Can there be total union if there is reservation with regard to one's fertility? Recall that marriage is the complete giving of self to the other without reservation. And if there is reservation at the greatest expression of marriage then there will be reservation elsewhere. Whether conscious or unconscious, the couple will fail in true union. This reservation, or holding back, fosters selfishness, harming the marriage and setting the course for future separation. It is my opinion that artificial contraception is the main reason for divorce and separation in the world today. Couples become selfish in a deceptive and hidden way, uncertain as to why their marriage did not last, knowing only that things did not work out. Failure to understand the mystery of sexual love, then, can have devastating consequences.

Yet, artificial birth control is not really birth control at all. It is fertility elimination, for that is its end. A couple has every right to regulate the number of children they desire to bring into the world, but they are not free to manipulate the order of fertility as established by the Creator Himself. To do so violates the ends of matrimony (as we saw above) and shows irreverence for God's creation which is always beautiful and proper. Now, it is not part of God's plan that every act of

sexual intercourse result in pregnancy. If this was so, God would have made the female 100 percent fertile all the time, as is the male. Therefore, a couple is free to work in harmony with the fertility cycle of the female, as designed by God, to either achieve or delay pregnancy.

The answer is fertility awareness, not elimination. Natural Family Planning (NFP) provides this awareness with a high degree of accuracy – 98 percent effective (this matches the pill). The Church is opposed to artificial birth control, (“fertility elimination”). The Church is open to natural birth control which is really “birth regulation.” Nothing is being altered or manipulated in NFP; the couple is simply working in harmony with what is already there.

Additionally, NFP has many benefits. This method is free. There are no harmful side-effects. It allows for true marital union. It places the responsibility equally on both the husband and wife. It is easy to learn. It leads to inner peace because the couple knows they are working in harmony with God. Whereas in artificial contraception the couple will have negative consequences in their marriage, the contrary is true here. Since there is no reservation at the highest and most intimate expression of marriage, there won't be reservation elsewhere, only a generous spirit of self-giving and unreserved love.

This method does, however, call for abstinence, but this should not be looked at negatively. Abstinence is good for a marriage. It leads to discipline, self-control and helps to keep romance alive. It fosters trust in the marriage. If there ever need be a separation (i.e. extended business trip, military tour, etc.) each will have confidence in the other's ability to be faithful and abstain because it has been an integral part of their marriage all along. Further, Scripture reminds us that there is an appointed time for everything: a time to embrace as well as a time not to embrace (Ecclesiastes 3:5).

Finally, a couple should reflect on why the Church teaches that artificial contraception is a sin. Her motivation is love. The Church is concerned about her couples and wants only the best for them. When she sees a danger that threatens their survival, she responds. Artificial contraception damages marriage, and that which damages what is sacred is evil. Certainly some couples may have difficulty with this teaching, but why not try NFP? It can't hurt and for some this is the only way they will be able to appreciate it. They should be sure to learn NFP from couples who are practicing it and be patient with it. (Any priest can direct a couple to the classes or to a teaching couple). It is different from the artificial means and so might sound a little strange at the start. But wouldn't the artificial means sound strange to someone who has never heard of them. It is important to realize that the Church's teaching in this area is very sound. Even a non-Catholic, if open to the Word of God and the Spirit of Truth, can grasp it. The problem today is that there exists a tremendous amount of confusion and distortion of this sublime teaching. So, take the time to understand it and see its inherent truth. “If you live according to my teaching,

you are truly my disciples; then you shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free." Here, the truth leads simply to the freedom to love.

## CONCLUSION

If a couple is not drawing closer together, they are drifting apart. These principles – Communication, Practice of the Faith and Natural Family Planning – will help them to always draw closer together, but the principles are intrinsically related. It is important to stress this, for without one, the others will fail. With them, a couple towers above the world and witnesses to it. For the world needs to see that marriage can last, and is meant to. It is sad that many couples never reach the depth of union that the Sacrament of Marriage offers them. Largely, this is due to the exposure and influence of the world. Marriage, however, is of God and He, Who's Kingdom is not of this world (Jn 18:36), calls us to a road different from the way of the world. "... for the gate is wide and the road broad that leads to destruction, and those who enter through it are many" (Mt 7:13). We cannot look to the world for answers because the world cannot give what it does not have, essentially, Eternal Truth (Jesus).

Let the couple then use these principles also as an examination of conscience to help them grow in holiness so that they mutually sanctify each other. Let them be confident that with them their marriage will truly be in the Lord. Finally, they should know they have the constant prayer and support of the Church as they begin their new life together, and that the Lord will be with them, always at their side. "For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Mt 18:20).

A word of caution about infidelity. It would be foolish for a couple to think they would never be tempted in this area. Nothing can destroy a marriage faster or leave it so permanently scarred as this. Couples must have a firm conviction that they will always be faithful to their vows, which is why it is good to renew them often. This strong conviction is fostered by the principles of Communication, Practice of the Faith and NFP and will reduce their vulnerability by giving clarity to their vocation.

Finally, marriage preparation never really ends. Marriage is a journey, a journey of the closest of friendships. The couple who thinks they know it all are simply wrong. Marriage is a mystery of God and so more can and should be learned. Couples should read often about what makes for a strong marriage and get to know couples who have a strong marriage so to learn from them. They should never stop growing in their love and knowledge for this sacred and holy mystery.

## THE INTERFAITH MARRIAGE

The interfaith marriage (or mixed marriage) is nothing new in the Church and many couples will find themselves in this situation. Everything we have just said still applies, the only difference will be the Practice of the Faith. The non-catholic will not be able to share in the Eucharist (Holy Communion), but is certainly invited to participate at Mass. There must be mutual respect for each other's denomination. Catholics, however, cannot compromise their belief that Catholicism is the fullness of Christianity, which is why they have the responsibility of raising the children in the Faith. This may lead to some tensions, but it is one of the concrete realities of dealing with a divided Christendom. The Church generously invites the non-catholic to consider conversion believing this will enrich their Christian beliefs, but the Church does not impose conversion. The option to convert is always available to the non-catholic throughout the marriage. Finally, let them realize that theirs is still a marriage in the Lord and that He will be there to guide them every step of the way.

# **ACTIONS FOR A BETTER CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE**

## **COMMITMENT**

All vocations require dedication. Through thoughtful and loving effort, we can strengthen our marriage. The sacrament of marriage provides the grace to remain committed.

## **CARING**

We show that we truly care through our love and acts of affection, attentiveness and concern for our spouse and family.

## **COMPLIMENTS**

We all thrive on sincere and genuine compliments. A kind word fuels and sustains the good efforts of each family member.

## **COMPASSION**

When we really care, we are moved to stop and to share in and feel the suffering of a family member just as the Lord did for us.

## **COMPROMISE**

We can solidify marital love and harmony and we can avoid conflict through our flexibility – our willingness to give in and accommodate others.

## **CHANGE**

Change is difficult. We should seek first to change and improve ourselves and have patience with others as they endeavor to change.

## **COMPATIBILITY**

Marriage is strengthened by our taking an interest in and sharing in each others activities and developing common interests.

## **COURTSHIP**

Marriage is made vibrant through continued courtship. Flowers, special dates, dining out, etc. keep a marriage fresh and help it flourish. Don't take your spouse for granted.

## COMMUNICATION

Communication is best achieved when we are attentive and when we are listening – when we make an effort to share feelings with each other. Be observant to notice “unspoken” communications and needs.

## CHILDREN

Children are a blessing and a gift from God. They are the fruit of love, and they will grow and develop according to the spiritual nourishment that their parents provide. Participate in their lives. The love you give as a parent will only enhance the love that you share with your spouse.

## COURTESY

Being considerate, polite and thoughtful strengthens love and precludes our taking our spouse and family for granted.

## CURRENCY

Keep spending (cash, credit cards, etc.) in line with income. Try to avoid creating economic and family worry and stress caused by overspending.

## CHEERFULNESS

Be cheerful and positive; avoid complaining, critical or condescending comments.

## CHERISH

Appreciate your family and thank God for this blessing in your prayers. Marriage is the rock upon which your family builds and thrives. Value it dearly in all your thoughts and actions.

## CLAN

Through marriage, one’s family grows to include in-laws. Good relations with one’s extended family improves the quality of the marriage and eliminates unnecessary stress.

## COURAGE

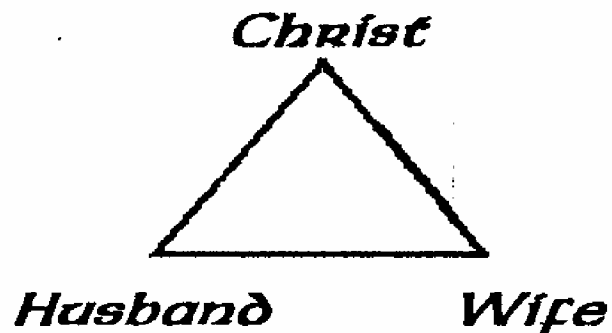
Marriage, like any vocation, requires spiritual strength and fortitude, especially in hard times and times of suffering. Through prayer and true dedication to our sacramental vows, God's grace can give us the strength to cope with any difficulty.

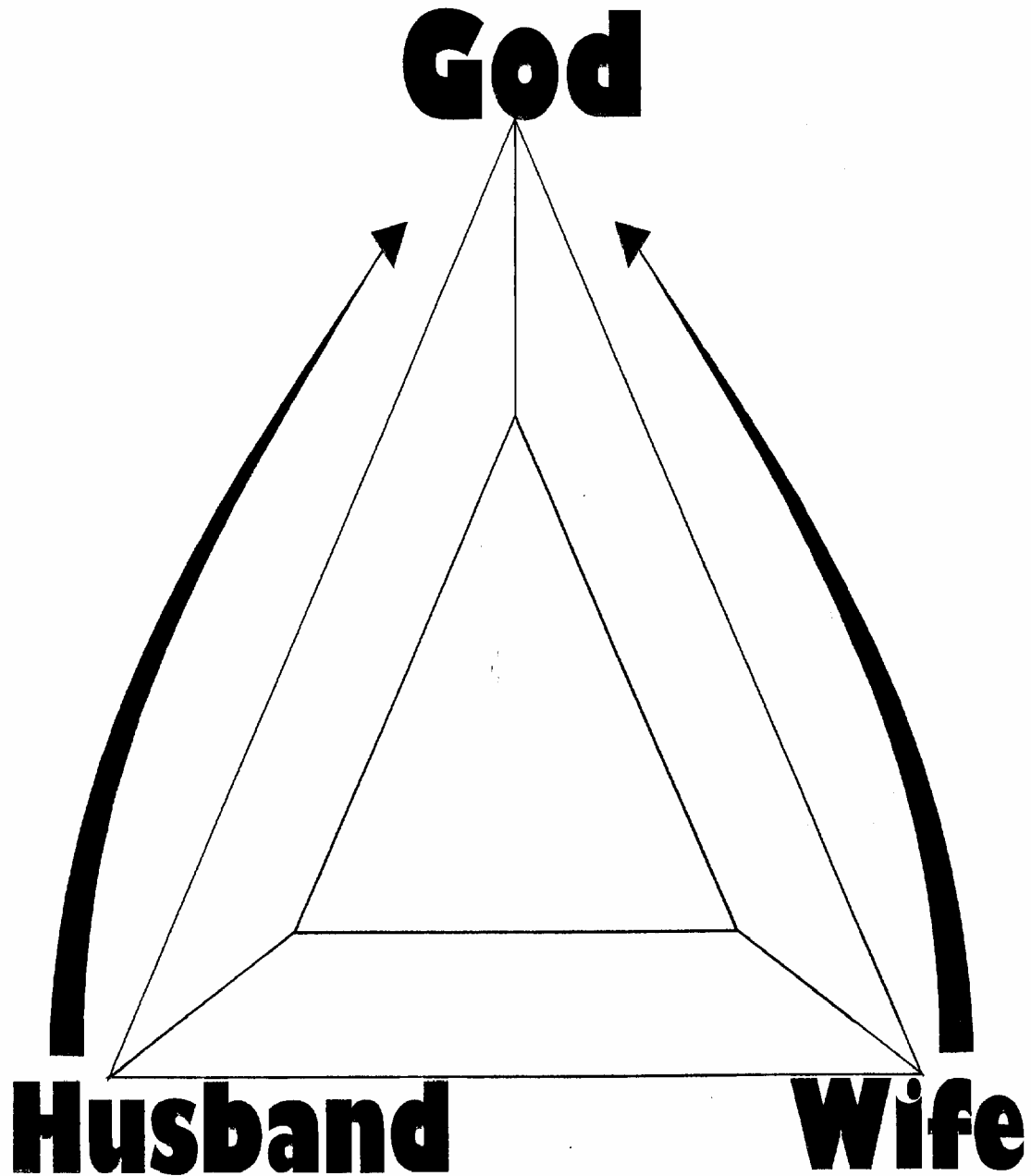
## CHURCH

Church is our extended spiritual family. As in our family at home, we are interactive members in our church, called upon to love and serve.

## CHRIST

Only through Christ do we perfect marriage. He bonds husband and wife, parent to child. As in a triangle, with Christ at the top, as husband and wife move closer to Christ, so also do they come closer to one another.





**The Closer you both become to God,  
the closer you become to one another.**

# The Indissolubility of Marriage: What Does the Bible Say?

By Father Francis Peffley

“For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one. So they are no longer two but one. What therefore God has joined together let no man put asunder.” “For your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife (unless the marriage is unlawful), and marries another, commits adultery; and he who marries a divorced woman, commits adultery.” “His disciples said to him, ‘If that is the case between a man and wife, it is better not to marry.’” (Mt 19:5-10, Mk 10:2-12).

We see from the disciples comment that they understood the full magnitude of Jesus’ statement that marriage is indissoluble. This teaching has caused many people to leave the Church, such as Henry VIII who took the Church of England away from the pope so he could grant himself a divorce, and in the end he beheaded his wives, and martyred St. Thomas More and many others. To see this tragedy, rent the movie “A Man for All Seasons.”

The indissolubility of marriage is the physical symbol of the spiritual reality of God’s fidelity to His chosen people. The violation of this covenant is a destruction of the most powerful symbol of the love of God for us, Christ for the Church. “This is a great mystery, and I mean in reference to Christ and the Church ...” (Eph 5:15-33, Rev 21:2). The Bible also says: “For I hate divorce, says the Lord the God of Israel.” (Mt 2:13-17). “To the married I give charge, not I but the Lord, that the wife should not separate from her husband (but if she does, let her remain single or else be reconciled to her husband) and that the husband should not divorce his wife ... A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives. If the husband dies, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord.” (1 Cor 7:10, 11, 39).

*The Catechism of the Catholic Church* (No. 1649) teaches “Yet there are some situations in which living together becomes practically impossible for a variety of reasons. In such cases the Church permits the physical separation of the couple and their living apart. The spouses do not cease to be husband and wife before God and so are not free to contract a new union. In this difficult situation, the best solution would be, if possible, reconciliation.”

A divorce is a civil dissolution of a legal marriage bond. An annulment is not a divorce, but is a declaration that a necessary element for a valid marriage was lacking at the time of consent, which means a true marriage never occurred.

**Fr. Peffley is associate pastor of St. Louis Catholic Church in Alexandria.**

# Natural Family Planning Gains Greater Acceptance

## Bible-based trend pulls Protestants to Catholic View

By Julia Duin  
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

Thirty years ago today, Pope Paul VI dropped a spiritual bomb in the form of “*Humanae Vitae*,” his encyclical banning all artificial methods of birth control.

Within 24 hours, 87 Catholic theologians had rushed to sign a dissenting statement. “*Humanae Vitae*” was portrayed as the ultimate insult to the progressive 20<sup>th</sup> century view of the family, which increasingly deemed children to be burdens costing parents hundreds of thousands of dollars to raise, instead of assets who could help out at home, for example, on the family farm.

“It was a watershed moment,” says Frances Kissling, president of Catholics for a Free Choice, which opposes “*Humanae Vitae*.” “It was received by the world as the definitive sign the church wasn’t going to enter the modern age.”

But much has changed in three decades, including the popularization of the Vatican-approved natural family planning (NFP) method in the 1970’s and a Bible-based movement that has brought many Protestants into the anti-contraception fold. Overall in the United States, slightly more than one-third of women of childbearing age don’t use artificial birth control.

Matt and Rachel Watkins, a Catholic couple from Baltimore, say they used the pill, the diaphragm and condoms but had three unplanned children for their pains. They signed onto NFP seven years ago. Couples adhering to NFP watch for signs of fertility during a woman’s menstrual cycle to gauge when they should abstain from sexual relations.

“I was at a point where my wife was ordering me to get a vasectomy, and I didn’t want to do it,” Mr. Watkins says. “It was too permanent. We started taking NFP classes, and Rachel didn’t want to take them. I encouraged her, and it began to work the way they taught us. My wife felt empowered by that. Here is something where we were relying on ourselves rather than doctors. This is the most feminist thing any woman can do.”

The Watkins belong to the home-schooling movement, which reaches across denominational lines and has turned increasing numbers of Protestants against artificial birth control. More Christians are subscribing to the biblical admonition that children are a blessing from God, and that the 10<sup>th</sup> or 15<sup>th</sup> child is as

meaningful as the first, says Michael Farris, president of the Home School Legal Defense Association and the father of 10.

“Virtually all reasons for birth control are built on the assumption another child will not be a blessing,” he says. “So these families conclude that to use birth control would be calling God a liar.”

Mr. Farris, who in 1970 won a college speech contest advocating zero population growth, says he and his wife changed their minds between child three and four. “My wife read this book ‘The Way Home’ by [home schooling advocate] Mary Pride, who laid out the argument that children are a blessing from the Lord,” he says. “As much as my mind rebelled against the idea, I had to agree.”

Questions among evangelical Protestants about birth control can be dated back to a November 1991 article in the evangelical magazine Christianity Today. Its story “Is Birth Control Christian?” was subtitled, “Of course, we thought until some pro-life and home-school activists challenged the practice.”

Debra Evans, an Episcopal childbirth educator in Austin, Texas, whose most recent book is “The Christian Woman’s Guide to Sexuality,” says a lot of Protestants are coming over to the Catholic point of view.

“A lot of people have never read ‘Humanae Vitae,’” she says. “This is a radical, progressive Christian document saying human life is worthy of existence and shouldn’t be tampered with at any stage. A lot of people who are saying if life begins at conception, what does that say about contraception?”

“All along, Roman Catholics have seen contraception as an extension to abortion. It’s taken Protestants longer to figure the connection out.”

Some of these Protestants have switched places with Roman Catholics, who 30 years ago were the ones with the large families. Today, 63 percent of all sexually active Catholic women are using artificial contraception, according to Catholics for a Free Choice. Sixty-two percent of all American women ages 15-44 – 37.7 million people – use some method of birth control, according to the Alan Guttmacher Institute. Of those 37.7 million, 10.4 million – 27 percent – use birth control pills.

The pill has made some Protestants queasy about birth control, says John Kilner, director of the Center for Bio-Ethics and Human Dignity in Bannockburn, Ill. The pill was a hot topic two weeks ago among the 225 persons who attended “The Reproduction Revolution,” an ethics conference at Trinity International University in Deerfield, Ill., sponsored by Mr. Kilner’s center.

There, a panel debated whether birth control pills are “abortifacients,” since one of the pill’s properties is to cause the uterine lining to reject a fertilized egg. For those who believe life begins at conception, the fertilized egg is a human being.

“If abortion is morally problematic, then the pill is problematic,” Mr. Kilner says. “The presenters there were of a mind that was the case.”

Thanks to the pill’s invention in 1960 and the U.S. Supreme Court’s 1965 ruling in *Griswold vs. Connecticut* that mandated easily available birth control, people could have sexual relations without reproduction, he says. Thirty years later, with the advent of cloning, humans are experimenting with reproduction without sex.

“Protestants and Catholics,” he says, “believe the two should be related.”

The two sides did not always agree. In 1930, the world’s Anglican bishops, meeting in England for the Lambeth Conference, voted 93-67 to permit birth control methods other than self-control.

In response, Pope Pius XI sued “*Casti Connubii*” a few months later. It condemned artificial birth control as violation of the “law of God and nature.” “*Humanae Vitae*” held to the same position.

“I think Paul VI saw the bigger picture,” Mr. Kilner says. “An increasing number of evangelical Protestants are echoing the concerns the Catholics had about technology. We thought it was benign when we thought it was about a little birth control pill. But now we’re starting to take a second look.”

## **LATE BABIES**

### **Famous people born late into large families:**

1. Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chretien – 18<sup>th</sup> (of 19 children)
2. Methodist Church founder John Wesley – 15<sup>th</sup> (of 19)
3. Wesley’s mother, Susannah Annesley Wesley – 24<sup>th</sup>
4. St. Catherine of Siena – 23<sup>rd</sup>
5. Campus Crusade founder Bill Bright – sixth (of seven)
6. German composer Richard Wagner – ninth
7. Austrian composer Franz Schubert – 12<sup>th</sup>
8. Medieval mystic Hildegard of Bingen – 10<sup>th</sup>
9. Boxing champion Evander Holyfield – eighth
10. Nominee for Catholic sainthood Edith Stein – 11<sup>th</sup>
11. Founding father Benjamin Franklin – 10<sup>th</sup> (of 17)
12. Cardinal Anthony Bevilacqua of Philadelphia – ninth (of 11)

# Why Is Birth Control A Sin?

**By Msgr. Richard M. McGuinness and Rev. John A. Quill**

In 1983, Pope John Paul II stated: “Contraception is objectively so profoundly unlawful as never to be, for any reason, justified.”

The Holy Father bases this teaching not on Church law, but on the natural law which is that part of God’s law as it applies to human beings and their actions. In his 1981 apostolic exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, he says: “As Teacher, (the Church) never tires of proclaiming the moral norm that must guide the responsible transmission of life. The Church is in no way the author or the arbiter of this norm. In obedience to the truth which is Christ ..., the Church interprets the moral norm and proposes it to all people of good will, without concealing its demands of radicalness and perfection ... She is convinced that there can be no true contradiction between the divine law on transmitting life and that on fostering authentic married love” (no. 33).

## Marriage

God created us as sexual beings. He put into us a natural drive or attraction towards the opposite sex. Its purpose is procreation and conjugal love. This drive is meant to be lived and enjoyed by man and woman in the permanent loving union called marriage. We should be able to know this by using our reason. To make it clearer, God decided to make it part of his Revelation. The union of Adam and Eve by God had as its purposes procreation: “Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth and conquer it” (Gen. 1:28); and conjugal love: “This is why a man leaves his father and mother and joins himself to his wife, and they become one body” (Gen. 2:24).

## Unnatural

When we make our sexual drive into an end in itself or go against its procreative purpose, we are acting unnaturally, for not doing what God intended. Violating his plan can never really fulfill us or make us truly happy. Contraception is an example of an unnatural practice.

Contraception is immoral in that it shows a lack of trust in God’s loving care. In contracepting, a couple relies not on God and their own grace-assisted ability to abstain for a while, but put their trust in contraceptive means. In a way contraception becomes an “idol” diminishing faith in God, putting aside trust in his providence and usurping his dominion over life. Pope Paul VI, in his encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, wrote: “To experience the gift of married love while respecting the laws of conception is to acknowledge that one is not the master of the

sources of life, but rather the minister of the design established by the Creator” (no. 13).

Contraception directly attacks the procreative purpose of marriage. It separates the procreative from the unitive end of marriage. Those who contracept are saying: “We’ll take the love apart, but not the life part, and we’ll make sure of this by using contraceptives.” The husband and wife divide that which God naturally joined together. What attacks one end of marriage also attacks, indirectly, the other. Thus, the unitive is reduced to the couple’s mutual self-gratification. Vatican II reminds the married “that a true contradiction cannot exist between the divine laws pertaining to the transmission of life and those pertaining to the fostering of authentic conjugal love” (*Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, no. 51).

Couples who sever the two ends of marriage block the natural process of conception. They do all in their power to make intercourse incapable of conception.

Pope Paul made it clear “that each and every marriage act must remain open to the transmission of life” (*Humanae Vitae*, no. 11). Willful intervention by contraception serves, according to him, “to contradict the nature both of man and of woman and of their most intimate relationship, and therefore it is to contradict also the place of God and his will” (*Humanae Vitae*, no. 13).

Why is Natural Family Planning (NFP) not immoral as well?

NFP would be immoral if practiced for purely selfish motives. NFP should be used only by married couples who have serious reasons for not wanting another child.

For spouses to limit marital relations to the wife’s infertile periods is not doing anything wrong; she cannot conceive at that time, and couples may have relations when the wife is naturally infertile.

Couples using NFP never exclude the possibility that God could choose to give them another child. They stand ready to accept another child if God wills, even though they would prefer not to for serious reasons. Preventing conception is not absolutized. Their attitude is: “If God sends me a child, I’ll accept it as his gift.”

## **Biblical Condemnation**

Does the Bible condemn contraception?

Onan, in refusing progeny to his dead brother’s wife, “spilt his seed on the ground” (Gen. 38:9). For this he was slain by God. The Levirate law required

that a brother have relations with his brother's widow if the brother died childless. However, Onan was not slain merely for breaking the Levirate law.

As a matter of fact, Onan's father, Judah, admitted that he did not give the widow, Tamar, to his other son, Shelah, after Onan died. If the offense were simply breaking the Levirate law, why did God not kill Judah and Shelah? The reason was that Onan was killed for spilling his seed. That is why contraception is sometimes called Onanism.

Contraception is included in St. Paul's condemnation of "sexual irresponsibility," since he mentions the latter in conjunction with "sorcery," which, in his day, included providing women with certain "magic potions," as contraceptives or abortifacients. (See Gal. 5:20-21.) St. John's condemnation of "witchcraft" may be an indirect denunciation of contraception, since women at that time sought out witches in order to obtain potions, *pharmakeia* in Greek, for contraceptive purposes.

### **How has the doctrine of *Humanae Vitae* developed during the past 30 years and what are some of Pope John Paul's contributions to that development?**

There are very few people other than John Paul II who have made contributions to that development. Most theologians and philosophers think it's a closed issue. John Paul II on the other hand has been very energetic in promoting the teachings of *Humanae Vitae*.

It started, of course, before his pontificate with his book, *Love and Responsibility*, written in 1960, and several other pieces throughout the '60s, that are quite profound deliberations on male-female attraction, relationships, sexuality. He is really an expert on these subjects. He ran an Institute for the Family in Krakow and there spent hours counseling married couples. Women who read this work do not believe it was written by a man; he has such deep insight into the female psyche. So he was well prepared for these issues and has made it one of the major themes of his pontificate.

In the early '80s he gave a whole series of Wednesday talks on the "theology of the body" and reflections on *Humanae Vitae*. His core insight is that contraception not only violates the procreative meaning of the sexual act, it also violates the unitive. He speaks of the sexual act as one of complete and total self-giving. Withholding one's fertility from that act means the self-giving is less-than-complete, which changes the nature of the act. He calls contraceptive sex "a lie." It's a form of lying with your body. You're saying, "I want to enjoy this momentary pleasure with you, but I won't share myself with you by our having and raising children."

## **So in separating the unitive and the procreative dimensions of the marital act, you end up getting nothing?**

I'm not sure that you get nothing. It may be that you get a greatly diminished unitive aspect. Just on the surface, the evidence is pretty amazing that contraception may have a pronounced effect on divorce. Robert Michael, a researcher at Stanford University has gathered statistics to show that contraception has greatly contributed to the increase in divorce. Some more casual studies show that couples using NFP (Natural Family Planning) divorce at rates under 2% to 4%. Since the rest of the United States is divorcing at a rate well over 50%, you want to say, "Wow! Something is going on here."

Obviously it's more than just one factor. You still have the other 50% of marriages that last and most of the couples in these are contracepting. So contraception is not a death blow to the unitive dimension. Still, couples who practice NFP or who switch to NFP often give remarkable testimony about how much more intimate and united they feel, not only in the sexual act, but in the whole relationship.

Men often don't understand how much a woman resents using a contraceptive like the pill, because of all the physical effects it has on her body. With couples using NFP, the women think and know they have husbands who greatly revere them, who don't want to sexually use them, and who out of love don't want them to use contraceptives.

I also make the point that contraception causes people to make bad choices for spouses to begin with. They enter into a premature sexual relationship relying on contraceptives, and then get married without having a good choice, and this contributes to divorce as much as if not more than using contraceptives within marriage.

# **Artificial Contraception Precludes Receiving Communion**

**By Most Rev. Glennon Flavin**

As a bishop of the Catholic Church and as a successor to the apostles, my first duty is to teach “the Catholic faith that comes to us from the apostles.” As bishop of the Diocese of Lincoln, my responsibility to you and to God is, in the words of St. Paul to Timothy, “To preach the word, to stay with this task whether convenient or inconvenient – correcting, reproofing, appealing – constantly teaching and never losing patience” (2 Tm. 4:2).

Today we live in what could be accurately called “a contraceptive culture.” The use of artificial contraception is widely practiced. Even some Catholic couples use this method to prevent conception; and some Catholic physicians do not hesitate to recommend the use of this means of birth control and even to prescribe contraceptives. That I may not fail in my duty to God and to you, I am compelled to write this pastoral letter to you, the Catholic couples and Catholic physicians of the Diocese of Lincoln, and to remind you that birth prevention by any artificial means is gravely contrary to the teaching of God and his Church, of which you are members.

## **The Nature of the Church**

To have certitude of faith in regard to use of marriage and indeed in regard to all teachings of the Catholic Church, we must understand the nature of the Church. Our Blessed Lord, the incarnate Second Person of the Blessed Trinity came to earth almost twenty centuries ago not only to redeem us by his passion, death and resurrection, but also to teach us how we must live our lives in order to spend eternity with Him in heaven.

Before He ascended into heaven, He founded his Church as the means through which He would remain with us until the end of time and through which He would continue to teach and guide and sanctify mankind until the end of the world. He chose Peter as the visible head of his Church. To Peter He said, “You are ‘rock’ and upon this rock I will build my church” (Mt. 16:18). To Peter He, the Good Shepherd, entrusted his flock: “Feed my sheep” (Jn. 21:17). To Peter and the other apostles, He gave the mandate: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations ... and teach them to observe all the commands I gave you. And know that I am with you always, to the end of time” (Mt. 28:18-20).

Christ, who cannot be deceived and who cannot deceive us because He is God, is still in the world today as He promised, teaching us through his Church what we must believe and how we must live; and the voice of his Church is the

successor of Peter, now Pope John Paul II. This is our Catholic faith: We believe that when Pope John Paul II teaches in matters of faith and morals, the Church teaches; and when the Church teaches, Christ the God-man teaches.

Therefore, we who have been blessed by God with the gift of the Catholic faith can have no doubt about the immorality of artificial contraception. The Catholic Church clearly teaches that the use of artificial contraception in all its forms, including direct sterilization, is gravely immoral, is intrinsically evil, is contrary to the law of nature and nature's God. This is and always has been the uninterrupted teaching of the Catholic Church from the beginning.

The ban on contraception is not a disciplinary law of the Church, like abstinence on Friday, which the Church can enact and which the Church can change and from which the Church can dispense for good reasons. Rather, it is a divine law which the Church cannot change any more than it can change the law of God forbidding murder. Artificial contraception is wrong, not because the Church says it is wrong (it was wrong before Christ established the Church); it is wrong because God Himself, through the revelation of his Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ, has declared it to be wrong. Because artificial contraception is intrinsically evil, it may never be practiced for any reason, no matter how good and urgent. A good end never justifies the use of an evil means.

### **Cooperation in Sin**

Catholic physicians and others who prescribe contraceptives or recommend their use are cooperators with those who use them. Such cooperation is gravely sinful. The same is true for physicians who advise contraceptive sterilization, or perform this procedure or refer a person to another physician for this purpose. In doing so, they, too, commit grave sin.

It should be obvious that Catholics who practice artificial birth control and those who cooperate with them in their immoral actions may not receive Holy Communion without committing sacrilege. Only the worthy reception of the Sacrament of Penance, which requires genuine sorrow for sin and the sincere intention to discontinue the sinful practice, will bring God's forgiveness, restore grace to the soul and make one worthy to receive Our Lord in Holy Communion.

Four years ago, Pope John Paul II, in his address to the bishops of the United States gathered in Los Angeles, very pointedly declared: "It has also been noted that there is a tendency on the part of some Catholics to be selective in their adherence to the Church's moral teachings. It is sometimes claimed that dissent from the magisterium is totally compatible with being a 'good Catholic' and poses no obstacle to the reception of the sacraments. This is a grave error."

While artificial contraception is always immoral, there is a morally acceptable way by which married couples may space the births of their children. For good and

sufficient reasons, spouses may regulate births by abstaining from the marital act during the wife's easily identified fertile periods. This practice is widely known as natural family planning. Recent scientific research has so refined the methods of natural family planning that today couples may practice responsible parenthood in ways that are altogether reliable, medically safe without harmful side effects and morally acceptable.

Dear Catholic spouses, there can be no true happiness in your lives unless God is very much a part of your marriage covenant. To expect to find happiness in sin is to look for good in evil. Sin is a bane to married life as it is to all life. Like a cancer, it destroys all that is good and joyful in your marriage relationship. On the other hand, to keep God in your married life, to trust in his wisdom and love and to obey his laws in the use of the marriage privilege will merit his special graces for you during the difficult times in married life, will deepen your love for each other and will bring to you that inner peace of mind and heart which is the reward of a good conscience. You will find the desire and the strength to follow God's law through the frequent and worthy reception of Holy Communion, the regular reception of the Sacrament of Penance and daily prayer.

Dear Catholic physicians, by reason of your Baptism and Confirmation, you are called by God to witness to the Catholic faith which you profess. As members of a noble profession, you are in a position to be God's instruments in manifesting his truth and his love. This you can do by dissuading your patients from the practice of sinful contraception and by introducing to them the moral methods of natural family planning. Then you will be the object of God's promise: "The person who brings a sinner back from his way will save his soul from death and cancel a multitude of sins" (Jas. 5:20). Thus, you will contribute to the spiritual welfare of your patients; and, like the Divine Physician, you will care for the whole person – body and soul.

It is my fervent prayer that Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception, the patroness of the Diocese of Lincoln, through her powerful intercession obtain for all God's people in our diocese, especially our Catholic spouses and our Catholic physicians, the grace to accept all the doctrines which God teaches us through his Church and to live them. For it is only in obedience to the Divine Will that a human heart may experience the peace of union with God – both in this life and in eternity.

*Excerpted from an October 7, 1991, pastoral letter. Reprinted with permission.*

# WHY DO CHRISTIANS USE BIRTH CONTROL?

## A PROTESTANT PERSPECTIVE

By Randall Terry

Have you ever stopped to think why Christian couples use birth control?

*“We just got married and we are not ready for kids.”*

*“We want to give quality time to the children we already have.”*

*“We simply cannot afford another child.”*

*“I’d go crazy if we had any more kids.”*

Do any of these excuses sound familiar to you? Or better yet, are you using any of these excuses?

When I discuss the notion that we should trust God with how many children we should have, I hear the above excuses again and again, plus a multitude more.

I have heard these excuses before – on the doorstep of an abortion mill.

The dreadful truth is that most of the excuses that women give for having their children killed through abortion are the exact same reasons we give for not having children.

At its core, birth control is anti-child. And I am not only speaking about abortifacients such as the pill or I.U.D., but any drug or device that prevents us from having children. When we use birth control we are saying, “No, I do not want children.”

Is it any wonder that the church cannot stop child-killing? How do we expect to defeat child-killing in the world when we cannot defeat child-rejection in our own midst? Jeremiah said if we run with footmen and grow weary, what will we do with horses?

I cannot be too hard on Christians who use birth control. My wife and I fell into the same trap when we were first married. We were told by all of our peers and spiritual leaders that it was the “wise” thing to do. Frankly, we would much rather have a nine year old son or daughter than such wisdom.

In an age of Christianity when we constantly talk about faith, trusting God, God supplying our needs, etc., why can't we simply trust God for how many children we have?

When we use birth control, we are cutting short our heritage; we are perhaps short-circuiting entire generations of humanity. Consider this: Mrs. Wesley's thirteenth child, Charles, wrote hundreds of glorious hymns; Mrs. Whitefield's seventh child George, was the most prominent preacher in the Great Awakening in America; Mrs. Washington's fifth child (fifth out of ten) was our beloved first President.

If Mrs. Washington had been in some of our churches today, after her third or fourth child half of the women in the church would have told her to get a diaphragm or have her tubes tied! What a tragic loss that would be for all of us.

What do you think when you see a woman with five children? Are you happy or embarrassed? Do you approach her with congratulations or condolences? Do you happily exclaim, "Are these all yours?! What a blessing!" Or do you somberly question, "Are these all yours? You poor thing. How do you do it? I would go crazy."

The horrible reality is that much of the Church today in America is anti-child. We view children as a burden, a nuisance, an interruption in our lives, a drain on our finances, a sapping of our strength, and on and on.

Many Christians can't get righteously indignant about child-killing when in their hearts they sympathize with why some women have abortions.

So what do we do? Hopefully, nobody reading this in on the Pill or using an I.U.D. If you are, stop immediately. They are abortifacients. If you know someone who is using them, be a friend to them and tell them the truth. But furthermore, if you are using any kind of birth control – stop. Leave the number of children you have in God's hands.

"Oh, but I'll have 10 kids!" I hear someone exclaiming. With all due respect, you don't know how many children you will have. Leah had six, Rachel had two, Sarah and Rebekah had one. The truth is, you simply don't know how many children you will have.

If you have been "sterilized," seek a medical reversal. I recently met a pastor in Oregon who sold his baseball card collection in order to pay for his wife's tubal ligation to be reversed. They are rejoicing in the Lord as she enters her seventh month of pregnancy with a child they almost never had.

One final thought; consider the origins of the birth control movement – Margaret Sanger and Planned Parenthood. Margaret Sanger wanted Christians (among

others) to use birth control. She despised our God, and loathed large Christian families. If someone could laugh in hell, she would surely laugh at us.

I would like to quote one of the least popular Psalms of our day, Psalm 127:3-5:

*Behold, children are a gift of the Lord; The fruit of the womb is a reward.  
Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one's youth.  
How blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them; they shall not be  
ashamed, when they speak with their enemies in the gate.*

These verses clearly proclaim how we should view our children – they are our heritage, our reward. In fact, our children are the only eternal possession we have except for our own souls.

God, restore to us a respect, a love and a desire for our most precious possessions – the fruit of the womb.

# “Humanae Vitae”: A Prophetic Document?

By Janet E. Smith

Twenty years ago in “Humanae Vitae,” Pope Paul VI “prophesied” that marriages and society would suffer if the use of contraception became widespread. Now the vast majority of spouses use some form of contraception and the use of contraception is widespread among the unmarried as well.

What did the Pope say? Was he right? Pope Paul made four prophecies about the bad consequences that would follow upon widespread acceptance of contraception: conjugal infidelity and the general lowering of morality; loss of respect by the man for the woman as a unique person; amoral population policies; a sense of limitless dominion over the human body and its functions.

In ways that the Pope did not always fully envision these prophecies have come true. There has been an increase in divorce, abortion, out-of-wedlock pregnancies. Today the dangers of contraception – for example, the IUD and the pill – are widely recognized. Involuntary sterilization and forced abortion have surfaced as elements in population control programs. Voluntary sterilization is widespread.

This list is not complete. Certainly for each of these problems there is a host of contributing factors. But contraception is one of these. Rather than solving these problems as its proponents claimed, contraception has made the problems worse.

In “Humanae Vitae” Pope Paul VI also pointed to the good that would come from abiding by the Church’s teaching on contraception. He acknowledged that spouses *may* have difficulty in acquiring the self-discipline or self-mastery needed to practice methods of family planning requiring periodic abstinence.

If spouses learn this self-mastery, there will be tremendous fruits for their own relationship and for the other relationships of their lives, especially those within the family.

“Humanae Vitae” claims that spouses will be able to develop their *personalities*, which will be enriched with spiritual values. It speaks of the “serenity and peace” that comes with discipline, a discipline that flows to other areas of one’s life. Perhaps most importantly, the spouses become unselfish; they become more concerned about the well-being of their spouses rather than about themselves.

Not to be underestimated is the witness spouses can give to their children and other young people.

Some think there is little difference between natural family planning (NFP) and contraception since both contraceptors and practitioners of NFP want to control their fertility. But users of NFP gain this control by self-mastery, by obtaining internal control over themselves; contraceptors seek this control by technological mastery of their bodies. Indeed users of contraception and users of NFP agree that there is a great difference between the two: neither switches easily or *readily* to the other. Contraceptors fear they will lose control over a very important part of their lives. They do not take comfort in the reassurances that NFP is every bit as effective a form of family planning as the most effective forms of contraception.

Many practitioners of NFP, on the other hand, have a profound sense that the use of contraception would violate the dignity of themselves and their spouses.

Certainly, most users of NFP, have struggled with the method and with their sexual desires. Eventually, they learn to communicate better with their spouses about their sexual feelings and their other feelings as well. And they begin to gain the virtue of self-mastery which enables them to control their sexual behavior. Once progress is made, they assure others that self-restraint enhances rather than harms one's love life.

Pope John Paul II recently spoke of the Church's teaching on contraception as part of the "permanent patrimony" of the Church. The successful marriages and happiness of couples who use NFP suggests that once we reclaim this patrimony, we shall begin to experience joys and benefits we have nearly forgotten.

# Birth Control ... It Almost Cost Us Our Marriage

By Bob & Gerri Laird

It was June 6, 1975, our fifth wedding anniversary. We were the “perfect” family with two beautiful children – a boy and a girl. Although material goods were abundant, we had been through many difficulties: job-related separations, several moves leaving behind family and friends, two miscarriages, and several bouts with ill health. Although as spouses we rarely argued or mentioned divorce, we were distant and unfulfilled

There was resentment between us. We were living as two single persons under one roof, each seeking equilibrium rather than growth. Our communication was superficial, and we avoided discussing controversial topics. We deemed our marriage a success because we were still together, unlike many of our friends who had separated. Our marriage was a social affair, and we did little to involve our Creator.

Perhaps, prior to marriage we had failed to understand the religious aspects of the sacrament of Matrimony. We were “in love,” and marriage had logically followed. Our engagement had been marked by celebrations and anticipations, with little spiritual outreach. Catholic teaching on human sexuality, parental roles and child rearing was often deemed too controversial to discuss at pre-marriage classes. Sad to say, our source for most Catholic information was the religion section of the local secular newspaper.

When *Humanae Vitae* (the prophetic encyclical of Pope Paul VI on human life and the regulation of birth) was issued in 1968, it was reported in the secular press as “one man’s opinion” which would probably change in time. Priests as well as lay people were confused. Our priest advised us to “follow our conscience” with regard to making a decision toward family planning.

“Follow our conscience” became our rallying cry. To us, this meant that we could legitimately use artificial birth control. After all, the majority of Catholics were contracepting, and calendar rhythm was outdated.

We started out with Gerri taking the Pill. Both of us found it far more challenging to remain chaste during this period of our marriage because the Pill eliminated openness to new life; Gerri couldn’t get pregnant. There was a great temptation to forego honest communication with one another and forfeit our chastity for premature sexual pleasure.

During our contraceptive years we worried about “performance” when we engaged in genital intimacy. We had lost sight of what true love really means –

giving for the good of the other. Without even realizing it, we were destroying the love/life bond which is so crucial to marriage. We were celebrating the unitive aspect of our relationship, but not the procreative.

It took us two miscarriages off the Pill before we made the decision to move on to another form of contraception. We tried condoms and foam briefly, but these were far too messy. We felt as though we were gearing up for war, not for love! When we tried the IUD, Mother Nature reacted rapidly. Within two months, Gerri had minor surgery twice because of infections. We also discovered that the IUD was an abortion-causing device.

It was at this point that Gerri attended a Catholic women's retreat and shared her frustration with birth control to a small group of ladies. A kind, elderly woman told her that God had a better way. She explained that the Catholic Church sees the sacrament of Matrimony as practiced each day of our married lives, not just on our wedding day. This friend showed how the ultimate expression of our marital intimacy through sexual intercourse is always open to transmission of life because it is open to the love between the couple and God. Love begets love. She also explained that couples who understand the natural biological rhythms of the woman can use them to conceive a child or to avoid sexual contact when there is sufficient reason to refrain from creating new life. Gerri borrowed a copy of *The Art of Natural Family Planning* (NFP) by John and Sheila Kippley and began using the method.

We struggled for several months as we tried to regain the freedoms we had lost through artificial contraception.

- Freedom to love each other through non-genital communication (a smile, a kiss, a hug) and develop true affection and intimacy without having to perform in the bedroom.
- Freedom to experience the physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual high of a spontaneous decision to have relations when fertile.
- Freedom to totally accept God's gift of fertility and submit to His will of creating or postponing new life.

Our lovemaking had become a very chemical and mechanical experience. When we freed ourselves from birth control, it was the beginning of a lifetime honeymoon – one that says, "I love you more today than yesterday, but not as much as tomorrow." Birth control had taken the mystery out of the most intimate part of our being. We had been manipulators rather than co-creators – exploiting one another at will. Using contraceptives had made us slaves to our desires.

The side effects were scary, and our relationship robotic. We had failed to ask ourselves two questions:

1. Where does God fit in if humans have their hands on all the controls?
2. What freedom is there in trying to outsmart the Master Designer?

Not having correctly understood the covenant we were making with God in the sacrament of Matrimony, we had been unwilling to commit to God's way, and we almost lost each other.

Perhaps part of our problem was that we had invoked Catholic teaching at our convenience. We'd failed to understand the true decision that our priest had asked us to make during our marriage preparation. It was not the decision to use or not use artificial contraception. In *Humanae Vitae*, Pope Paul VI tells us to follow a correctly informed conscience in making the decision leading to the possible creation of new life. Such an awesome decision! We found that if we could do that, then other decisions regarding such mundane issues as purchasing a home or an auto became trivial.

NFP is not "Catholic birth control," nor is it calendar rhythm. It is a concept of fertility awareness that allows the married couple to understand the biological signs of the wife and then determine if they have sufficient reason to avoid a pregnancy that month in accordance with the teachings of the Church. If sufficient reason exists, then the couple abstains from sexual intercourse but continues to show their love in non-genital ways. If sufficient reason does not exist, the couple pours forth their love knowing that the result could lead to the creation of a child. What a powerful option!

Sexual intercourse is indeed a privilege – it comes with the marriage covenant. When we fully embraced God's teachings on marriage, our attitude toward our own two children changed drastically. We discovered that they were indeed gifts – a tangible sign of the most intimate love between husband, wife and God. We had a natural desire for more children, and our family continues to grow.

We think the answer to the persistent question of why the Catholic Church is so opposed to artificial birth control is perhaps too obvious. Contraception is unnatural and unhealthy. It harms us physically, psychologically, emotionally and spiritually. Our Church opposes it not only because it may cause us permanent damage, but also because it artificially removes the possibility of conception from the act of intercourse. NFP is good marriage insurance – a real piece of the rock on which to build a solid family foundation. Statistics support this marriage-building aspect of NFP.

Couples who practice a natural form of child spacing have a divorce rate of less than 2%.

Our Lord speaks to us in such different ways. We must learn to listen. That unnamed woman who explained to Gerri what the sacrament of Matrimony really meant was symbolically to us the same Person who walked on the road to Emmaus or who calmed the stormy Sea of Galilee. Perhaps he was trying to tell us the truth many times through many people, but we chose not to listen. Fortunately, our God is patient. We may not always see Him, but He is always there. We praise Him and thank Him for our fertility. May we glorify His name through our family.

# Arlington Women Can ‘Have It All’

**By Elizabeth Foss**

“I want a doctor who gets to know me personally.”

“I want to know my doctor will be there to deliver my baby – I don’t want a stranger in the delivery room.”

“I wish my doctor would act as enthused and interested in my fourth pregnancy as he did when I was pregnant with my first baby.”

“I want a doctor who views birth as a normal, healthy process.”

“Instead of lecturing me on failure rate or not commenting at all, I wish my doctor would offer encouragement and medical support to the practice of Natural Family Planning.”

In the past six months alone, I have heard women voice all of these desires and more. After a refreshing conversation with Dr. John Bruchalski, I am happy to report that the women of the Arlington Diocese can have it all. A young OB-GYN living in Herndon, Dr. Bruchalski is a pro-life doctor in every sense of the word. Not only is he anti-abortion, he is practicing in a way few doctors do: he is not prescribing contraceptives. To be pro-life is to be much more than simply anti-abortion, it is to support and nurture the families who are bringing new life into the world. It is a pro-active position which encompasses the entire family structure.

As a resident physician in Norfolk, VA, Dr. Bruchalski became increasingly concerned by what he termed “epidemic suffering that could be directly related to contraceptive behavior.” He saw women with sexually transmitted diseases, women with infertility problems, women who had been sterilized and wanted reversals, women with multiple partners and women who had had multiple abortions. He says that “in all those areas where I was trying to better gynecological health, it was being undermined by the contraceptives I was prescribing.” In his third year of residency, he stopped performing sterilizations and prescribing hormonal contraceptives.

As he became more convicted of the inherent evils in artificial birth control, Dr. Bruchalski began to research the gynecological literature in order to find out if anyone had predicted such epidemic problems as a result of easily accessible contraception. He found nothing in the textbooks. The only writing that spoke of the scourge he was witnessing was “*Humanae Vitae*.” This revelation led him to take a serious look at Natural Family Planning.

In August 1991, he joined a private practice in Silver Spring, MD, where he worked with two other physicians. Although the other doctors did prescribe contraceptives and perform sterilizations, Dr. Bruchalski refrained from those practices. In his practice, he discovered another enormous benefit to Natural Family Planning: "Women who practice NFP are much better patients. They are educated about their bodies and come to me with very useful information which, in turn, makes me a better doctor."

He has decided to move his practice to Northern Virginia to be closer to his wife and 14-month-old son. He will have hospital privileges at Fair Oaks Hospital. The area is rich with resources on the sympto-thermal method, the Billings method and the Creighton method, all of which will enable him to make referrals as necessary.

Dr. Bruchalski also spoke at great length about the spiritual support in the Diocese of Arlington. In the course of our conversation, it was his spiritual awareness and emphasis which set him apart from any other physician I've known.

He will expect his staff to support his patients spiritually as well as medically. Dr. Bruchalski assured me that "without a doubt, every staff member will be grounded in the concept that there is an intimate connection between body, mind and spirit."

Like the doctor himself, his staff will be encouraged to "see the Christ in everyone who comes into the office." While he will be the only doctor in the practice for a few months, he expects an infertility specialist from a Catholic center in Omaha to join him by the fall. A physician's assistant will work part-time in the clinical practice and part-time in an educational capacity.

The staff will pull together to truly support families. First and foremost, children will be seen not as contraceptive failures but as gifts from God. The doctor has a keen interest in providing support for crisis pregnancies and an environment where adoption is a real option. Breast feeding will be encouraged and patients will be educated about its nutritional benefits to the child as well as its child-spacing properties.

I think it will be in labor and in delivery and in times of suffering that Dr. Bruchalski will be the most obvious blessing to his patients. I remember when I was very ill and referred to my doctor as "Father" and my priest as "Doctor." The two were both so crucial to my healing – body and soul – that I confused them. I needed science and I needed God. Though a natural process, labor, like a medical crisis, is a physically and emotionally trying experience. It demands inner mental and spiritual strength as well as physical effort. Dr. Bruchalski has founded his practice on that intimate connection.

He sees labor as a “healthy, integrated experience that doesn’t have to be inundated with technology to make it safe. As long as the physician is keenly aware of his patient’s safety, he won’t need many of the trinkets of technology.”

Dr. Bruchalski doesn’t plan to play God but to call upon Him. He fully expects to pray with and for his patients, bringing spiritual comfort and grace to women and their families and a simple witness to a hospital environment.

I have the sense that this doctor’s patients will be very much aware of God’s presence in their lives, no matter what circumstances have brought them into his care. John Bruchalski’s vision of his practice is clear and he expressed it to me eloquently when he told me of his dream for a labor/delivery/recovery environment: “I envision a place where prayer and science come together as a wonderful, healthy, life-giving experience as opposed to a technology nightmare.”

Those interested in finding out more about Dr. Bruchalski’s practice can contact him at 703/273-9440.

*Foss is a freelance writer and managing editor of Welcome Home, a magazine for mothers at home.*

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# Contraception and Divorce: A Link

By Nona Aguilar

Years ago, many contraception pioneers promoted the idea that if a man and woman could physically express their love at will, without fear of pregnancy, they would grow closer, strengthening their marriage. Widespread contraception in our society now places us in a position to evaluate the correctness of this belief.

It doesn't stand.

A headline in a recent issue of the New York Times summarizes our experience: "U.S. Divorce Rate Rises Again After Leveling Off." Another headline the same day noted that one-parent families have increased by 79 percent.

Certainly we are now in a position to concede that widespread contraception does not strengthen the marriage covenant. But now it is time to ask ourselves a new question: Is there any relationship between contraception and divorce?

I believe that most would say, on the face of it, there is no relationship between artificial birth control and the divorce rate. But I also believe the time has come to take a close look at that question.

## Serendipitous

My interest in the relation of contraception to divorce was piqued during work on my book on Natural Family Planning. I asked several teaching organizations, including the Couple to Couple League, to publish requests in their newsletters for couples willing to fill out a questionnaire on their experience with a natural method of birth regulation.

In time, some 164 six-page essay-type questionnaires were returned. I learned many things from the men and women who responded anonymously, but that one thing that struck me was the fact that only one respondent had been previously married and divorced. Only one!

I am not sure any researcher would know how to evaluate that. For the record, it works out to be a divorce rate of 0.6 percent for this group of NFP users.

Several explanations for the low divorce rate have been suggested. What if, for example, all the responding men and women had only been married a short time? Couldn't this explain the low divorce rate? It could – but 30 percent of the couples had been married less than six years. Forty percent were married 6 to 11 years, and 30 percent were married 11 years or longer. Thus, 70 percent of the respondents had been married six years or more.

Does that six-year benchmark mean much?

Possibly. The New York Times article I mentioned noted the median duration of marriages ending in divorce was 6.6 years.

In short, length of marriage does not explain the low divorce rate.

The next most popular explanation is that all the respondents must have been Catholic and the Church does not allow divorce and remarriage.

This is not a successful explanation since many respondents were careful to note they were not Catholic but still favored Natural Family Planning methods. Second, even if all the respondents had been Catholic – some statistics show the Catholic divorce rate about the same as the Protestant or Jewish divorce rate.

I am not sure how any researcher would evaluate the low divorce rate shown by NFP couples responding to my survey. But I think one thing can be said with certainty: the use of Natural Family Planning does not seem to hurt the marital relationship despite the abstinence period of about 10 days or so. But there is a larger question: does the use of NFP actually help a marriage? Can it be a factor in deepening and strengthening the love bond shared by a couple?

### **What is Natural Family Planning?**

Scientific breakthroughs make it possible for a couple to determine their fertile time with about 99 percent reliability. The couple that does not wish to conceive abstains during the fertile time.

### **How reliable are these methods?**

Method use-effectiveness has proven 99 percent, as used by almost 500 couples during a three-year period.

***The following is a true story submitted by a woman who was married in 1978.***

I met my husband when we were students in the same PhD. program. Now it is hard to believe that two graduate students could have been so naive, but at the time we were married we believed that the only way we could be sure of avoiding pregnancy was for me to take the Pill.

Sure, we knew about barrier methods, but somehow it seemed to us that no one really trusted those devices anymore. I remember going to the student health center to ask a doctor for information about fertility and birth control. He simply wrote out a prescription for an oral contraceptive. This was the same doctor who had been treating me for mononucleosis, which I still had at the time.

I began to suffer from side effects immediately. I became dizzy and unbelievably tired. Soon I became so weak I had to give up my teaching responsibilities. I was told that I would have adjusted to the drug after taking it for three months. So I kept on taking it, but the symptoms did not improve. I was so fatigued and so prone to contracting virus infections that I was forced to drop out of my program of studies. I was sick all the time!

It did occur to me to discontinue the Pill, but when I approached my doctor about it, he would just move me from one Pill to another. Whenever I tried to discuss it with my husband, he would react in alarm: "Do you want to get pregnant!?"

I began to resent my husband. For the sake of our sexual relationship I was required to sacrifice my health. I was being kept constantly under the influence of drugs in order to be available to him. Our sex life became very unsatisfying. I felt as if I were an object and not an equal partner in our marriage.

Even so, I continued to take the Pill for two years. I was gaining weight uncontrollably; my complexion was pasty; my personality changed until I felt as if I had become a zombie. I was out of control of myself emotionally and physically. I was subject to severe depressions. The lethargy and the poor self image brought on by this situation produced an attitude in which I did not question or try to put an end to what was happening to me.

I continued like this until I came across some information about diaphragms. We tried one of those and I thought I was finally free of the Pill until I had my first menstrual period. I developed symptoms of toxic shock syndrome! This happened for several months in a row.

I would never have put up with the diaphragm in the first place if I had not seen it as the only way I'd be able to quit the Pill. My resentment against my husband continued because I saw him as being allowed to participate in our marriage as a free person. He came to the marriage bed as he was, while I was still required to

alter myself. I was not allowed to give myself freely in our marriage relationship, not to experience fully the physical aspect of our love. It seemed to me like using contraceptives was causing our whole sex life to be focused, not on the union of our two persons, but on avoiding the pregnancy which might result.

Although I loved my husband, I regretted having gotten married. I felt trapped in a situation in which I would only be an object in the sexual union until we were trying to get pregnant. I wished we had just started out trying to have a baby. That could not have been so harmful to our relationship as contraception had proved to be.

I believe our marriage would have come apart then if I had not happened upon some information about the Sympto-Thermal Method of natural family planning. It turned out there is a group of people who teach the method, called the Couple to Couple League. I was almost afraid to contact the organization, but my repugnance for contraception encouraged me to overcome my qualms and explore any possibility of finding a usable alternative.

We didn't have any teachers in our area but we were able to teach ourselves using the CCL book, *The Art of Natural Family Planning*. The first cycle was pretty traumatic – wondering if I'd taken the temperatures properly, wondering if I was checking the mucus and cervix signs thoroughly – in short, wondering if I was doing it right. But it really didn't take too long for me to learn to "read" my signs. Soon the procedures became second nature, like a daily hygiene program, and occupied only a few minutes of my day at times which did not interfere with any possible romance.

I became aware of my body, how I felt in the different phases. I was very happy to have learned to observe my cyclic changes, even independently of the question of controlling fertility. The awareness and understanding of this part of myself led to increased self-respect and self-confidence in other areas as well.

This is not to say that all the problems in our sexual behavior were solved overnight. It took me a long time to break old habits of mind, not to be thinking, at the first indication of a sexual encounter, "Have I taken my Pill today?" or "When do I go and put in the diaphragm?" Once I got over the preoccupation with contraception, I was able to be wholly present in the experience from start to finish. It was fantastic! Giving our whole selves to each other intensified the sensations of pleasure and the feeling of unity in this expression of our love.

We still had problems with the periodic abstinence which is a necessary part of NFP. This is a difficult discipline to live with, but it gave us the opportunity to recognize a need in our marriage for more affection. It seemed to me for the first half year at least that my husband either just ignored me throughout the time of abstinence, or else made advances that made me uncomfortable. I could not make an affectionate gesture to him without him responding in a way which was

too hot and heavy and expecting me to keep things under control. But he is working on this. And at least now I know that he finds me attractive. He has seemed much more attracted to me since I quit using contraception. I also know that my husband respects me as a person in my own right. He accepts my fertility as a part of me. Actually, in spite of his difficulties with the abstinence period, he has become an enthusiastic promoter of NFP, recommending it to his friends. So, I know that the problem is not too serious. The time of abstinence can be a time for rekindling the romance, making it all the more exciting to share the sexual expression of love after the waiting. We are both continuing to work on learning to exchange simple affection.

After using NFP successfully for a year to avoid pregnancy, we used it to achieve pregnancy! Following the signs to select the best time, we were able to conceive on the first try. Now we can see on the chart the day on which our baby's life began. This experience would not have been possible for us had we not used NFP to get in touch with the nature of our fertility and to understand its role in our relationship.

Since the baby's birth, I have been using the NFP procedures to watch for the return of fertility while engaged in "ecological" (natural) breastfeeding. This gives us the security of knowing that it isn't time yet to worry about another baby. Soon we will be celebrating the first birthday of our little girl. Already we have celebrated the anniversary of her beginnings. This is a memory we will always cherish.

During recent months, my husband has been bringing me flowers and other thoughtful little gifts, as he used to do in the early days of our courtship. In my turn, I have worked at regaining my appearance and energy following the birth, and at trying to make special times to share with him. Our love is deeper than it ever could have been had we continued to permit contraception to stifle our relationship. I am sure that by being true to our natures, we can keep the romance fresh through all the years.

# Why the Church Is Granting More Annulments

By Jeffrey Keefe, O.F.M. Conv.

**“I understand that marriage is forever – for better or worse. Now the Church is granting annulments right and left. Whatever happened to ‘let no man put asunder’?”**

This isn't just a question. It's a cry of anguish from many sincere Catholics who are puzzled, upset, at times angry, when they hear that someone who has been married five, 10, even 25 years, obtained a Church annulment and remarried with Catholic rites. How could a marriage go on for years and still be invalid, they want to know.

Yes, marriage is still permanent. The indissolubility of sacramental marriage remains a central Catholic teaching. Pope Paul VI and Pope John Paul II strongly reaffirmed the uncompromising doctrine that a consummated, sacramental marriage bond is lifelong and cannot be broken by civil or Church authority.

While carefully protecting Jesus' teaching of the sacredness of marriage, the Church also is obliged to provide justice for anyone whose marriage has failed when it can be shown with moral certainty that the marriage lacked from its onset some essential element for a true sacramental bond. Pope Paul VI noted that delayed justice is injustice, and streamlined the annulment procedure. During the 1970's and early 80's, special norms for the annulment procedure were in effect on a provisional basis. Many of these revisions have now been made part of the Code of Canon Law promulgated in 1983, acknowledging the continued necessity for a just procedure in marriage cases and the deep needs of those whose lives have been touched by divorce.

There are six million divorced Catholics in the United States. However one views this statistic, it represents a searing experience of personal tragedy for six million persons. Many of these persons are wounded further by feeling cut off from the Church, and should they remarry, they are barred from the solace and strength of the sacraments. The annulment procedure is an attempt to bring justice and compassion to many divorced and separated Catholics whose marriage actually was one in appearance only.

**“An annulment is divorce, Catholic style, right?”**

This is a catchy, but incorrect way of putting it. Misunderstanding is due partly to the word *annulment*. The precise term is “declaration of nullity.” A declaration of nullity is a judgment by the Church that what seemed to be a marriage never was in fact a true marriage. An annulment is not a divorce for it does not dissolve an

existing marriage. A declaration of nullity is granted when it can be shown that some essential or juridical defect made a particular marriage invalid from the beginning despite outward appearance, despite even the good faith of the partners or the establishment of a family. It should be underscored that an annulment does not affect the legitimacy of the children of such a marriage.

Certain factors have brought about the considerable increase in Church annulments over the past decade. First and foremost, the Second Vatican Council fostered development in the theology of marriage by restoring the interpersonal relationship of the spouses as an essential component of marriage.

Secondly, advances in psychology have provided a deeper understanding of the complexity of both human decision-making and interpersonal relationships. Thus the Church has new insights for appraising a marriage. Marriage, after all, is the most important decision most people make, and marriage the most intimate of adult relationships.

### **“Did the Second Vatican Council change the Church’s understanding of marriage?”**

The Council changed the understanding of marriage only by deepening it. Those of us whose catechism days were before Vatican II learned that marriage is a contract whereby a man and a woman pledge themselves exclusively and perpetually to one another, bestowing the mutual right and duty of sexual intercourse. We learned that the primary purpose of marriage is the procreation and rearing of children, and that secondary aims included mutual affection and support of the spouses, as well as satisfaction of sexual desire. We also learned that any valid marriage between baptized persons, Catholic or Protestant, is a sacrament as well as a natural bond.

The Vatican Council in its *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* recast the standard definition of marriage which previously had been stated in terms of primary and secondary ends. The Council Fathers repeated that marriage is ordained for the begetting and education of children, “the supreme gift of marriage.” But the Fathers also noted that “[some] other purposes of matrimony are not of less account.” Marriage, they said, is a “*communion of life*, and maintains value and indissolubility, even when offspring are lacking ...” (#50).

### **“Is the Stress on the Relationship Between the Spouses New?”**

The Council Fathers thereby returned to the teaching of medieval theologians like St. Bonaventure and St. Thomas, who taught that the *relationship between the spouses* undergirds the traditional ends of marriage, namely, children, fidelity and permanence.

More fundamentally, the Council returned to the biblical theme of marriage as *covenant*, an interpersonal commitment based on trust, self-giving and sacrificing love. By this covenant the partners “render mutual help and service to each other through an intimate union of their persons and their actions” (#48).

A deeper theological understanding of marriage emerges from the Council’s brief but cogent overview. Marriage surely serves God’s command to increase and multiply, but this does not exhaust its essential qualities.

Church Law today reaffirms the personal relationship, the intimate partnership between the spouses, as a crucial, basic dimension of marriage. While conjugal union is expressed most specifically and intimately in sexual relations, it also extends to the couple’s total life together, to physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual community. In short, marriage is a union of persons, not simply a union of bodies. The purpose of marriage is to give life, but equally, to share it.

Unfortunately, this focus on the interpersonal core of marriage had become blurred ever since the 1500’s by a legalist mentality in the Church which viewed marriage within the limited scope of sexual rights and duties. As long as a man and woman had pronounced their vows and had consummated the marriage physically, it was presumed valid, regardless of the quality of the interpersonal relationship. *The Council restored community of life between spouses as an essential element of marriage.*

**“How can a Church court decide whether a marriage is valid or not? How can anyone undo the ‘I do’?”**

This question hits the bull’s-eye. For marriage is effected by *consent*, freely and knowingly saying “yes” to all that marriage involves. Therefore, in considering a particular marriage, this “yes” is the key issue. Its validity may be considered in the context of two basic questions about consent.

*First*, when they said their vows, did both partners freely accept and clearly understand the lifelong commitment they were making? And *secondly*, at that time, did both partners have the personal capacity to carry out consent, to form a community of life with the chosen partner?

- **Quality of Consent.** Let’s take that first question and look at the quality of marital consent, which is far more exacting than ordinary decisions. Consent to marry is the most weighty decision the person ever will make. Its effects endure beyond the here-and-now; it is a lifelong choice. Obviously an individual must know to what he or she is agreeing.

Consent must be free and discerning. External or internal pressure, which significantly reduces freedom or undermines critical judgment, could impair

consent to such degree that commonsense requirements for such a binding decision as marriage are not fulfilled.

For centuries, theologians have recognized that strong emotion and external pressure could weaken free choice and diminish responsibility as far as sin was concerned. The Church has been more cautious in applying these principles to marital consent. Modern psychology's study of decision-making shows more sharply how unconscious motives and situational pressures can get in the way of freedom and judgment. Such findings greatly help Church tribunals assess the adequacy of marital consent.

The shotgun marriage is an outdated joke. Yet more subtle pressures may interfere with freedom and discernment just as effectively. Take, for example, the couple who have been intimate and now the woman is pregnant. She rightly refuses abortion. She does not want to give up the baby for adoption. The father feels trapped. He may have fine intentions, feeling honor-bound to do "the right thing." One or both may see marriage as the only way out. Is this decision a free, mature choice of a lifetime partner, or is it a pressured solution to a problem?

What about the consent of the teenager, overwhelmed by infatuation with the only person ever dated, in love more with love than the person he or she consents to marry? Or the youngster with no critical appraisal of the character of the intended partner, and with meager appreciation of the financial responsibilities of marriage or the burdens of parenthood? Add to the picture, perhaps, the desperate need to escape an unhappy home life, marred by alcoholism or quarrels.

How would we assess the widower, still grieving for his deceased wife? He has a demanding job and is anxious for his young children. So he hastily remarries. Is he giving prudent, thoughtful consent or enlisting a housekeeper and stepmother for his children?

What sort of consent is given by a person with lukewarm, nominal faith, who has absorbed the divorce mentality which pervades U.S. culture, and the philosophy of casual sex which is daily TV fare?

There is no automatic answer about the quality of consent in these examples. Surely the average disinterested adult would question the wisdom of such marriages, and have qualms about the freedom or discretion of the immature or agonized person taking marriage vows. A thorough investigation by the tribunal of the premarital situation may support the conclusion that one or both of the partners could not freely and maturely choose to marry at that time.

- **Capacity to Carry Out Consent.** Marriage essentially includes a community of conjugal life which is perpetual and exclusive. Therefore, both partners must have the maturity to establish and sustain a mutually supportive communal relationship with one another.

Saying “yes” without the capacity to carry it out is invalid, even though a person takes marriage vows in good faith and with the best intentions. St. Thomas phrased the principle neatly: “No one can oblige himself to what he can neither give nor do.”

Before we had a better understanding of human behavior, both the average person and the Church thought everyone had what it takes to make a marriage work except the most overtly disturbed individuals. Before Vatican II, the Church considered the marriage contract principally in terms of procreative rights and obligations. The wider issue of a mutually supportive human relationship, while never totally ignored, was given second billing.

The right to a communal relationship does not mean that marriage must be idyllic. Any two people, even ordinary friends, have incompatibilities to work through. Few if any persons are so mature that they have no failings, foibles or hang-ups regarding self-worth, pride, aggression or sexuality. But the basically mature person tries to be honest with self, admit mistakes, be open to advice and to grace.

But in some persons, psychological problems are the consuming, motivating force of life. One’s sense of alienation or inadequacy, self-depreciation, hostility, sexual problems, impulsiveness or selfishness can be pervasive and chronic. It is most unlikely that such a psychologically burdened individual can establish and maintain the close, empathetic, cherishing relationship with a spouse which provides for mutual growth and the proper rearing of children. In plain words, the person entering marriage does not have what it takes to develop the community life which is the substance of the marital pledge.

#### **“What type of emotional problems could impair consent?”**

For some time, the Church has recognized that *psychoses*, the disintegrative mental illnesses such as schizophrenia and manic depression, could so impair mental and emotional stability that one’s consent to marriage lacked the necessary discernment or capacity. More recently, using further psychological points, the Church acknowledges that other dysfunctions of personality may render a particular marriage covenant impossible. It is difficult to make general statements because human psychology is so complex. But with that note of caution, it can be said that *homosexuality* and *alcoholism* often undermine the capacity for a permanent community of life and love.

Another group of emotional disturbances carry the label *personality disorders*. The personality disorders do not show the acute episodes or bizarre features of psychoses, or the disabling anxiety or symptoms of neuroses. However, they are marked by deeply ingrained maladaptive patterns of behavior, usually with roots in early life, and often evident by adolescence. Such persons may function well enough in certain areas of life. Fact is, they may be wizards in their work, excellent providers and efficient household managers, and adept in casual social encounters. But they are psychologically unable to meet one essential criterion of marriage, the close and intimate personal relationship of mutual support and affection.

The facts garnered from a personal history may reveal that an individual carried a tremendous resentment which sabotaged the marital relationship by constant and uncontrolled temper outbursts, by demanding and depreciating attacks on the spouse and children, and even by physical abuse.

Still others reach physical adulthood hampered by a sense of insecurity and a lack of trust so corrosive that they believe no one really could love or be true to them. They are hypersensitive and often show jealousy which sparks arguments even with chance acquaintances and rules out the loving relationship marriage is meant to be.

Some individuals compensate for inner insecurity by empire-building. Their total involvement in achieving success or status or a big bank account has a driven, compulsive quality that engulfs their lives. They tend to be workaholics who cram their schedules and overcommit themselves. By doing so, they escape the intimacy which threatens their overblown independence, and collect the payoff of feeling unappreciated. They may be rigid, niggardly and domineering, their unspoken motto often is "Do it my way." Fearful of dependency, they come on strong. Their underlying insecurity blocks the cooperation, compromise and communication essential for any deep interpersonal relationship.

There are also persons who are afflicted with a sense of worthlessness and self-hatred so intense that they are caught up in a constant search for affirmation and love. But they defeat their own quest by petulance over an endless series of perceived slights. Their impulsive grasp for reassurance can entangle them in extramarital affairs or dependency on drugs or alcohol.

Not infrequently, the long-festering emotional or character problems become evident only under the stress and pressure that occurs in marriage. The first marriage crisis uncovers the immaturity which had been signaled only by vague hints before this time. The birth of a child may reveal gross irresponsibility, unwillingness to sacrifice or pathological jealousy, which were not clearly displayed during the romantic courtship or exciting atmosphere of early marriage.

However, neither is it unusual that signals of later problems were quite evident before the marriage, but simply denied by the other party, or glossed over with the unwarranted hope that marriage would change the partner. (This seems especially true when heavy drinking is in evidence before the marriage.) Marriage to someone with a severe personality disorder is at best cohabitation, at worst a living hell. A relationship of constant discord, tension and debilitating stress is hardly a community of life and love.

The precise clinical labels of these disorders are not important here. This sampling simply suggests how certain types of people can make a particular marriage a morally impossible venture. Nor is it always so one-sided. Sociological studies do not support the old law that unlikes attract. One immature person often manages to find an immature partner. What's unlike may be the type of immaturity. For example, the person who has an insatiable need for attention and affection seems to have a talent for marrying a person scared of closeness.

These personality descriptions sound harsh. Yet they are sketches of truly handicapped persons. In their early years, often through no one's fault, they were shortchanged on the love and stability needed for self-esteem and security, and from which later mature independence and relationships develop. The failure of their marriages – and their lives – is often more due to weakness than evil intent.

The marriage tribunals of the Church do not seek to assign blame for marriage breakup. They seek only to understand a failed marriage, and determine whether either or both partners lacked proper consent or the ability to carry out consent.

**“Isn't it a painful ordeal for persons seeking an annulment to dredge up the past?”**

Many persons do remark how wrenching it was for them to recall and sort out painful memories. But they also find that it helped them to discover some meaning in the tragedy of a broken marriage. They appreciate their new insights about themselves and deepen their sense of values. This process can foster psychological and spiritual growth.

Some Catholics, clergy and lay people, argue that a decision within one's own conscience is sufficient to be right before God. Yet most persons have a strong need for external confirmation. Marriage is a public event, a religious contract over and above a civil one. Consequently, many believers feel the need for an external, independent, religious judgment that their marriage was not valid. As one man expressed, “When you get a divorce, you think you'll feel not married. I don't.”

A woman, forced into divorce to protect the welfare of her children, obtained an annulment and remarked that now she felt peace because she had “at least a piece of paper in my hand to prove to myself once and for all that I did try, that a marriage existed on paper only, that I did not fail in my duties as a Catholic, that the Church does understand ....”

But the greatest benefit of the pain for many who have established a happy and stable second marriage is their return to the sacraments, the sometimes tearfully joyful reception once more of the Lord in the Eucharist, and the renewal of religious practice as a family celebration.

An elderly priest, after taking part in an annulment hearing, put it simply and poignantly: “It’s a great healing.”

### **ABC’s of Annulment Procedure**

- A. Consult your parish priest, providing him with a summary of the principal facts concerning the courtship, marriage and breakup. What happened around the time of the marriage is especially relevant. He may ask further questions to assess whether there may be grounds for an annulment.

In some dioceses, you may directly contact the diocesan tribunal office at the chancery (headquarters of your diocese) and make an appointment with a staff member.

- B. Each diocese has somewhat different procedures. Typically, you may be asked to fill out an initial short questionnaire, giving salient facts related to a possible annulment.
- C. Church law requires that the other partner must be contacted and informed of the petition. His or her active cooperation will help the tribunal in its decision, but noncooperation of a spouse is not always a drawback. The other partner has the right to oppose the granting of an annulment.
- D. If the preliminary information you provided is promising, it is usually necessary to complete an extensive questionnaire, reviewing the family life of the partners before marriage, the courtship and the marriage itself. Some dioceses also employ psychological testing at times to better understand the personality of one or both partners.
- E. After written testimony has been obtained, there is a review by tribunal staff members to determine whether it is sufficient to proceed to a formal hearing.

- F. Witnesses are needed who can corroborate or add to the information. Persons who knew the parties before the marriage usually are the more helpful. It should be noted that all persons are interviewed individually to maintain the strictest confidentiality. A psychiatrist or psychologist may be consulted as an expert witness. Children of the marriage are almost never involved in a hearing, and even then this applies only to one who is an adult.
- G. The formal hearing, held at the diocesan tribunal office, includes tribunal judges who ultimately hand down a decision, an advocate who presents the petitioner's case, possibly an advocate for the other party, and a "Defender of the Bond" who monitors the proceeding so that both partners' rights are protected and Church law is observed properly.
- H. Given the fact that such decisions are so important, all judgments of nullity are reviewed by another court. In addition, the parties themselves can request their own appeal of a decision if they are unsatisfied with the prior ruling.
- I. There are court costs involved. Some people initially are offended by this need, but when they discover the many hours of staff work, the need for office space and equipment, as well as outside professional services, they agree that the tribunal has kept cost to a minimum.

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# Why Would a Protestant Need an Annulment?

By Rev. John Dietzen

*In a recent answer to a Catholic man who had remarried, you stated that since he was not married originally by a priest or with a dispensation, his first marriage was not valid according to Church law. He did not need an annulment.*

*I was married last summer to a fine man, a member of the First Christian Church. His ex-wife is a Methodist, so they were married by a minister: We have been told by my parish priest that my husband and his ex-wife had to ask for an annulment through the Catholic Church even though neither is Catholic?*

*Why this inconsistency? If the man who wrote to you does not need an annulment, why does my husband? (Indiana)*

From my mail and my personal experience as pastor, more confusion exists over this matter than over any other point of Catholic marriage legislation.

Catholics as well as non-Catholics who are considering marrying a Catholic would save themselves enormous inconvenience, misunderstanding, grief and hurt if they would burn into their minds two basic, general rules in Catholic marriage legislation:

1. Catholics must be married before a priest or deacon to be validly (that is, truly, effectively) married in the Catholic Church.
2. If they are married legally, the marriage of two non-Catholics, whatever their religion or lack of religion, is as valid and real a marriage as a Catholic marriage as far as the Catholic Church is concerned.

As I said, ignorance of the fact that there is a big difference between those two situations causes widespread and unnecessary confusion.

The Catholic Church has laws like this for its own members to assist and strengthen them in their faith, individually and in their married and family life. The Church does not, and has never wished to, apply those laws to people of other faiths or of no faith at all.

Thus, if two people who are not Catholic and who are not prevented by some impediment (such as a previous marriage to someone else) marry before a Protestant minister, a justice of the peace or any other legally recognized official, the Catholic Church recognizes that marriage just as everyone else does.

Those two rules explain why the Catholic man who was never married before a priest is now free to marry in the Catholic Church.

They also explain why the Catholic Church considers your husband's first marriage to be a real one. Your parish priest is right. In our understanding of the meaning of marriage, he would not be free to marry again until the union with his first wife is dealt with properly.

Incidentally, contrary to what some people claim they were taught, the Catholic Church has never denied the validity of marriages between non-Catholics just because that marriage took place before the minister of another church or a civil judge rather than a priest.

We Catholics respect the sacredness and, when the spouses are baptized, even the sacramentality of those marriages as seriously as we respect the marriage of two Catholics within the Church.

So, I'm sorry for the inconsistency and confusion you perceive in what is happening. I hope you will talk with a priest and follow through with whatever is possible so both you and your husband might practice your faiths fully.

*Send questions to:  
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# You're Paying Court Costs, Not Buying an Annulment

**The Wise Man Answers  
By a Franciscan Priest**

## Why Do Tribunals Charge?

*I am a divorced Catholic working on an annulment. I am getting static from people who aren't Catholic. They tell me the only reason the Catholic Church has annulments is to make money – otherwise it would go broke. This talk angers me. I plan to go through with my annulment, but I would like to know why the Church makes you go through annulments and has you pay for them. I have to give these people an answer.*

**There are two basic reasons for going through an annulment or declaration of nullity process:**

1. It gives the person who wishes to remarry an informed and official judgment that he or she can in good conscience do so. The person in effect asks the tribunal, "Was my previous marriage a real sacramental union in Christ? Or was the marriage actually invalid for these reasons I give? Can I enter into a new marriage without sin? The person is asking for assistance in making a conscience decision. Having received a declaration that the previous marriage was not valid, the person is able to have peace of mind and conscience in entertaining a new union.
2. Just as the civil courts are protectors of good order in society, the tribunals are protectors of good order and the common good in the Church. The civil government has laws and to protect the welfare and rights of people entering into marriage and the families that result. People entering into marriage have to take blood tests, obtain a civil license, exchange the marriage promises before a legally authorized person and register the marriage once it has taken place. If civil divorce is to take place, the state considers the welfare of the children of the marriage.

The state does all this because if it didn't there would be chaos in society. Who would protect a wife from being abandoned by her husband? Who would see to it that the children receive support and care? To whom would property go if people went in and out of marriage-like relationships at will? Who would be responsible for debts?

The Church as another kind of society also has an interest in protecting marriages, families, and children. The interests are more spiritual but they are

real. The Church has an interest in assuring each of the potential partners to a marriage that the other person is free to marry. Jane has a right to know that Dick can enter into a sacrament with her. To help the spouses-to-be establish a happy and stable marriage, they are required to prepare themselves by pre-Cana courses or Engaged Encounters. Counseling is given to them. The Church insists that a representative of the Church witness the marriage and that it is duly entered into parish records.

Carrying out the role given it by Christ, the Church reminds the married of their obligations of fidelity and love. To preserve order in the Church and in the administration of the sacraments, the Church says that a person who believes his or her marriage was for some reason invalid should have a judgment of that fact before attempting to enter a new union. This judgment gives the person receiving the annulment peace of conscience and assures any new partner he or she can enter into a real sacramental marriage with this person. I have tried to say in "The Wise Man Answers" many times that declarations of nullity (annulments) aren't like fishing licenses or passes to a ball game. They cannot be handed out for a fee or willy-nilly at the whim of some official. They are judgments of facts. If some tribunal believes a marriage cannot be proved to be invalid, it cannot grant an annulment. And if 26 people should conspire to give false testimony to deceive a tribunal into making a declaration of nullity, a new union would not be valid and the person attempting a new union, knowing of this deception, would not be free from sin in doing so. God knows!

In regard to the tribunal charges for the annulment process, they are like civil court costs. No one is getting rich from them and they are not a means of supporting the Church. Just as it takes money to run the civil courts for the benefit of society and the persons who use them, it takes money to maintain a Church tribunal.

Church tribunals have to pay for water, electricity and building maintenance. Clerks and secretaries who work full-time for a tribunal have to be paid if they are to eat and live. The tribunal has to pay for postage, stationery, office and so on. The diocese pays a great deal of this cost from contributions of all the members of the diocese. But it is only fair and just that those who use the services of the court and bring their cases there for judgment should help pay some of the costs. Civil courts also assess fees and court costs.

Finally, let me say this from personal experience: I served among the judges of a diocesan tribunal and also as an advocate for persons requesting annulments. I spent hours and hours of time taking testimony and preparing arguments. No

one paid me anything. Besides the anguish I experienced in knowing that people's happiness and spiritual welfare depended in part on what I was doing, I took personal abuse from people angry at a person asking for an annulment. In short, tribunal work "ain't fun." It makes no one rich and those who serve on tribunals ought to be thanked for accepting the responsibility of a service which is little appreciated and often criticized.