

The Ecology of Christian Marriage

John and Sheila Kippley

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Foreword

John and Sheila Kippley have penned a most useful book for couples preparing for the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony. I think its title—*The Ecology of Christian Marriage*—is appropriate in this environmentally conscious age.

Short and easy to read, this small book is packed with a wealth of helpful information to help couples achieve a happy ecology in their marital life. Readers will learn—

- how ecological breastfeeding benefits both baby and mother and is a natural child-spacer;
- that systematic Natural Family Planning (NFP) based on awareness of the female fertility cycle can be used both to achieve and to postpone a pregnancy;
- why unnatural forms of birth control contravene the authentic human ecology found in God's plan for love, life, marriage, and the family;
- that placing God at the center of their lives will help them remain faithful to each other for better and for worse until death;
- that Christian marriage is a covenant that is renewed and deepened in and through the marriage act when done honestly as a total gift of self (including fertility) and with generosity (open to life), but becomes deformed when rooted in selfishness and closed to new life.

As a parish priest who has been preparing couples for marriage for almost three decades, my sincere hope is that priests, deacons, and others who work with couples in marriage preparation will make good use of this wonderful little book.

To young couples preparing for marriage, I hope that you will use what you learn in the following pages. By following what the authors set forth regarding Systematic NFP and Ecological Breastfeeding, you will experience many blessings of good health both physically and marriage-wise.

By taking to heart what you learn in chapters 5 and 6, you will grow in discipleship and marital happiness.

By being generous in having children, you will experience many blessings of God's grace and much joy from the gift of those children whom Our Lord will grant to you.

May God continue to bless you richly,

Father Dwight Campbell, Pastor
Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Church
Kenosha, Wisconsin

Introduction

Congratulations! You are preparing for the wonderful reality called Christian marriage. If you are not using this book as part of your preparation for marriage, please understand our orientation. Either way, welcome.

You may have some questions, or you may think you know everything you need to know except a few insignificant details. Either way, this small book might help you and your future spouse to widen your perspectives.

About the title: Ecology is the branch of biology dealing with the relations and interactions between organisms and their environment, including other organisms. Many of these ecologies are mutually beneficial. It also applies to human relations. What we do and what we think certainly affect our relationships with others. Marriage involves not just one but several mutually beneficial ecologies.

This booklet is not a complete marriage manual. We have written it only to provide clarity on certain issues and perhaps introduce you to some others. In doing so, we have tried not to make any assumptions about your practice or non-practice of the Catholic Faith. In fact, unbelievers who simply want what is best for their children and want their marriage to be happy and to last “until death do they part” will agree with most of what they read here.

Our special thanks to our creative friend Beth Dunn for suggesting the green theme. Our thanks also to the reviewers of our manuscript. Their comments spurred us to try to make it more readable. We hope we succeeded.

--John and Sheila Kippley

1. The Most Natural Way

The Mother-Baby Ecology

Let's start with something that many believers and non-believers agree is important: **breastfeeding**. This is also something you probably did not expect to see in a booklet about preparing for marriage. Ecology is concerned with the relationships between two organisms and how each affects the other. Ecological Breastfeeding, which we will discuss soon, is the form of nursing in which 1) the mother fulfills her baby's needs for frequent suckling and for her full-time presence and 2) in which the child's frequent suckling maintains the milk supply and postpones the return of fertility and menstruation.

Health benefits for both baby and mother. Informed people everywhere agree that breast milk is the best nutrition for babies and that nursing directly at the breast is the best way for a baby to obtain this great health benefit. For babies, breastfeeding reduces the risks of contracting at least 21 **specific** diseases and conditions. Breastfeeding also provides additional **general** health benefits for babies and young children including a better immune system and scoring higher on cognitive and IQ tests at school age.¹ A baby's brain continues to develop for 12 months, and breast milk is the best brain food.

There is also no question that breastfeeding is best for mothers. The breastfeeding mother enjoys reduced risks of breast cancer, endometrial cancer, ovarian cancer, type 2 diabetes, heart disease, thyroid cancer, anemia, lupus, rheumatoid arthritis, and osteoporosis. The latter benefit reduces the risk of hip fractures later in life.²

¹ John and Sheila Kippley, *Natural Family Planning: The Complete Approach*, 2018, 103-104. Hereafter: NFPTCA.

² NFPTCA, 104-105. Here you will find the references related to breastfeeding.

A mutually beneficial relationship. A newborn baby has a weak immune system and thus depends on his mother's immune system.³ In the order of nature, a mother's immune system makes up for the weakness of her baby's immature immune system. If her baby gets some sort of illness or infection, the baby's suckling transmits the "bug" to his mother. In turn, her immune system develops the antibodies, and she transmits them to her baby in subsequent nursing episodes. As breastfeeding researcher Dr. Stephen Buescher has said, "Breastfeeding is a system of nutrition, information, and protection."⁴ From the perspective of faith, breastfeeding is a divinely planned mother-baby ecology.

When mothers stay close to their babies to satisfy their suckling needs, the mothers also satisfy the emotional needs of their babies. Clearly, this mother-baby ecology is mutually beneficial, and we recognize God's providential care in this interaction. In brief, the Author of nature knows what He is doing.

Breastfeeding and the environment. The *British Medical Journal* on October 2, 2019 surprised its readers with this headline, "Support for breastfeeding is an environmental imperative." Researchers calculated the environmental effects of manufacturing baby formulas, and in this way they showed the indirect effects of breastfeeding on the air we breathe. They concluded that "helping mothers in the United Kingdom alone to exclusively breastfeed their babies for six months would reduce carbon emissions equivalent to reducing road traffic by 50,000 to 77,500 cars each year."⁵ The article then described some of the many health benefits of breastfeeding.

³ To avoid the awkward "her or his," *her* refers to the mother and *his* refers to the baby.

⁴ Full reference in *NFPTCA*, 104.

⁵ Support for breastfeeding is an environmental imperative. Naomi Joffe, Flic Webster, and Natalie Shenker. *BMJ* 2019; 367:I5646.

Breastfeeding and natural baby spacing.

Does breastfeeding naturally suppress fertility and thus produce a greater space between pregnancies? That depends. There are different patterns of breastfeeding, and all of them have a certain amount of value because of the inherent values of breast milk and the breastfeeding process. However, regarding breastfeeding and baby spacing, we need to make distinctions.

In the Western world, common cultural breastfeeding patterns typically do **not** space babies, but there are two patterns of breastfeeding that **do** affect the return of fertility. One pattern is called **Exclusive Breastfeeding** and may provide natural infertility for six months if the three requirements below are followed. The other pattern is called **Ecological Breastfeeding** and may produce natural infertility for one or two years.

Exclusive Breastfeeding has three specific requirements.

1. The baby is **exclusively** breastfed. The baby receives **only** his mother's milk **directly from her breasts** for his nourishment. He does not receive any other food or liquid. His mother's milk is his only food and liquid.
2. The mother has no menstrual bleeding **after** the first 8 weeks postpartum.
3. The baby must be **younger than 6 months** of age.

When mothers fulfill these requirements, research indicates a 98% non-pregnancy rate during the first six months postpartum. On the other hand, about half of the mothers doing Exclusive Breastfeeding will menstruate before six months, and that first period needs to be regarded as a sign of fertility.⁶

⁶ Kippley, NFPTCA, 107-108

Ecological Breastfeeding (EBF) goes beyond Exclusive Breastfeeding and includes specific mothering practices which we call the **Seven Standards**. Natural baby spacing through breastfeeding needs to be taught in terms of the Seven Standards of Ecological Breastfeeding. These Standards are maternal behaviors that allow **frequent** and **unrestricted** nursing. Mothers who breastfeed in this pattern will have their first postpartum menstruation return, on average, 14 to 15 months postpartum. The Seven Standards of Ecological Breastfeeding are as follows:

1. Breastfeed exclusively for the first six months of life; don't offer your baby other liquids and solids, not even water.
2. Pacify or comfort your baby at your breasts.
3. Don't use bottles and don't use pacifiers.
4. Sleep with your baby for night feedings.
5. Sleep with your baby for a daily-nap feeding.
6. Nurse frequently day and night, and avoid breastfeeding schedules.
7. Avoid any practice that restricts nursing or separates you from your baby.

Each one of the Seven Standards is evidence-based. That is, independent published research demonstrates that each of these behaviors is associated with increased nursing and breastfeeding amenorrhea.⁷ This amenorrhea is the natural and normal absence of menstruation due to breastfeeding.

A bit of history. A group of breastfeeding mothers collectively wondered why some mothers had an early return of menstruation while others had their first postpartum period at 18 to 20 months. Sheila was asked to research the difference, so she did. She did her library research, developed a survey, and wrote her first book, *Breastfeeding and Natural Child Spacing* (1969). This survey-based

⁷ This research is documented in S. Kippley, *The Seven Standards of Ecological Breastfeeding: The Frequency Factor*, Lulu, 2008, lulu.com.

research showed that American mothers who followed the Seven Standards of Ecological Breastfeeding had an average of 14.6 months of breastfeeding amenorrhea (the absence of periods) before they had their first period.⁸

We also found a big range in the duration of breastfeeding amenorrhea. About 7% of these mothers had a first period or bleeding by six months and 33% were still in amenorrhea at 18 months. In other words, an “average” is an average within a range of shorter and longer durations of breastfeeding amenorrhea. A second, larger study (286 nursing experiences) published some years later found an almost identical average of 14.5 months of breastfeeding amenorrhea among American mothers.⁹ More recently, Sheila found independent research that supports each of the Seven Standards and published this as *The Seven Standards of Ecological Breastfeeding: The Frequency Factor*. All the Standards are important. Experience shows that if you drop any one standard, the odds are that fertility and menstruation may soon return.

There are two great advantages of Ecological Breastfeeding. First, it maximizes the benefits of breastfeeding-in-general. The frequent suckling of Ecological Breastfeeding maintains the milk supply, and babies thus get all the health benefits provided by nature and intended by our Creator.

⁸ Sheila and John F. Kippley, “The Relation Between Breastfeeding and Amenorrhea: Report of a Survey,” *JOGN Nursing*, (J of Nurses Assoc of The Am College of Obs and Gyns) 1:4, November-December 1972, 15-21. Also in S. Kippley, *Breastfeeding and Natural Child Spacing*, Lulu, 2008, 132-137. Online at: <http://nfpandmore.org/relationbreastfeeding.shtml>.

⁹ S. and J. Kippley, “The Spacing of Babies with Ecological Breastfeeding,” *International Review of Natural Family Planning*, Spring/Summer 1989. Online at <http://nfpandmore.org/spacingbabies.shtml>. Also in S. Kippley, *The Seven Standards of Ecological Breastfeeding*..., 86-89.

Second, it is a natural way of spacing babies.¹⁰ As a correspondent wrote us in November 2020, “Ecological breastfeeding has worked SO WELL for us that we have not needed to abstain. We are expecting our 3rd child, and all our children are naturally spaced almost 2.5 years apart!” (emphasis in original). Other couples will use Systematic NFP (Natural Family Planning based on fertility awareness) when fertility returns if they need additional spacing.

On the other hand, some couples say they want to let God do the planning and they will take the babies as they come. These couples should be well instructed about Ecological Breastfeeding. After all, it is God’s own plan for spacing babies. They should also practice fertility awareness. The temperature sign provides an excellent way to determine the time of conception and the estimated date of childbirth. Parents and doctors need this important information.

Directly from God. Because this natural form of child care and baby spacing comes directly from the Creator, you have a God-given right to know about it. That’s why we think that every form of NFP instruction should include Ecological Breastfeeding. It truly is part of God’s plan for mothers and babies.

Ecological Breastfeeding is not only cost-free, but it **saves** money. You don’t need to buy formula, and that will probably save you about \$2,000 with each baby (in 2021 dollars). Also, since breastfed babies are generally healthier than non-breastfed babies, Ecological Breastfeeding will probably save you money in doctors’ bills and health care. Ecological Breastfeeding is great for babies, for mothers, and for your wallet. That’s why NFP International places so much emphasis on Ecological Breastfeeding.¹¹

¹⁰ “Providentialists” say that they are leaving all baby spacing up to the Providence of God. That’s one more good reason to follow God’s plan for nourishing and protecting their babies with Ecological Breastfeeding.

¹¹ Natural Family Planning International, www.nfpandmore.org.

Another organization that promotes breastfeeding and especially Ecological Breastfeeding is the Catholic Nursing Mothers League.¹² It seeks to develop chapters in parishes, and pastors would do well to cultivate its services.

Green and greenest. While breastfeeding-in-general is obviously the “green” way of caring for your babies, Ecological Breastfeeding is the greenest. No bottles, no formulas, no commercial baby foods, no pacifiers, and even no feminine hygiene products for 14 to 15 months on average. Plus, Ecological Breastfeeding provides a mother-baby closeness that is the best social environment for babies. What more can the environmentally sensitive person ask for? And it all comes from God.

¹² <https://catholicbreastfeeding.blogspot.com>.

2. A Second Natural Way

The Marital Ecology

The Creator of nature is also the Creator of man and woman. He designed woman with a cycle of fertility and infertility. Contemporary knowledge of the fertility cycle and how to estimate the fertile time started in 1930. Currently this knowledge is called “fertility awareness,” and using this knowledge to achieve or avoid pregnancy is called “Systematic Natural Family Planning” or more generally “Natural Family Planning” (NFP).

Some important history. In the early 1850s, French veterinarians were aware of a fertility cycle in female farm mammals, and they speculated about a human female fertility cycle. They erroneously thought that the most fertile time was menstruation, but their speculation raised a moral question. That is, if married couples can know the fertile and infertile times of the cycle, is it morally permissible for them to abstain from the marriage act during the fertile time in order to avoid pregnancy?

This question called for clarification by the Church, and in 1853 the Vatican replied that it was not immoral for them to do so, provided 1) they had a sufficiently serious reason to avoid pregnancy and 2) they practiced chaste abstinence. Thus, the Church approved the principle of using chaste periodic abstinence to avoid or postpone pregnancy. If the researchers had looked at the Bible, they would have seen that the Book of Leviticus (15:19-24 and 18:19) calls for abstinence during menstruation plus seven days, thus encouraging the couple to come together again at what is the most fertile time of the typical cycle. As we see it, this was God’s plan for building up the children of Abraham. It is also the first known form of systematic NFP.¹³

¹³ www.nfpandmore.org. >NFP Resources, NFP Articles, >A Short History of Natural Family Planning.

Modern fertility awareness. Researchers in Japan and Germany discovered a cycle of human female fertility in the 1920s and then sought a way to determine the beginning and the end of the fertile time. In early 1930, Dr. Kyusaku Ogino authored an article in a German medical journal that claimed to define the fertile and infertile times of the cycle based on a woman's previous long and short cycles. Today we call that "Calendar Rhythm." It has a lower level of effectiveness than later systems, but some couples used it with high effectiveness.

Shortly thereafter, a German Catholic priest, Father Wilhelm Hillebrand, learned from a doctor (his brother) that a woman's basal temperature (her resting temperature) rises after ovulation. In 1934, to help his parishioners, he taught them to use the wife's waking temperatures to cross-check the Calendar Rhythm calculations. We call that the Calendar-Temperature system. In 1967, a study of the Calendar-Temperature system showed a 99% level of effectiveness in avoiding pregnancy for couples who followed the most conservative rule of the Calendar-Temperature system.¹⁴ (There's more on this in Chapter 4.)

Natural family planning. Today there are different systems of fertility awareness to identify the fertile time. In addition to menstruation and the temperature signs, much attention is given to cervical mucus, and some attention is paid to changes in the cervix itself. Also available are urine test strips to measure the levels of fertility-related hormones, but the strips are not cheap.

In all systems, the "method" used to avoid pregnancy is chaste abstinence during the fertile time of the cycle. This is called systematic Natural Family Planning (NFP). Another form of NFP is Ecological Breastfeeding in which frequent

¹⁴ G. K. Doering at <http://nfpandmore.org/Doering-1967-100315.pdf>.

suckling postpones the return of fertility, as we have already described.

Fertility and infertility. It is important to realize that the fertility awareness of NFP can also be very helpful for achieving pregnancy. You are probably correct in assuming that you and your spouse will have no trouble becoming pregnant, but that's not true of every couple. Some have infertility problems. While some couples are infertile because of a health problem in one spouse or both spouses, many couples of marginal fertility can achieve pregnancy simply through proper fertility awareness and timing. Other couples can increase and normalize their mutual fertility through improved health habits and dietary supplements. Some wives overcome marginal fertility by taking guaifenesin, a cough syrup ingredient that also liquifies cervical mucus.¹⁵ Proper and morally correct medical assistance can help others.

If a couple has an infertility problem that cannot be resolved by morally acceptable means, the answer is adoption, not *in vitro* (glass dish) fertilization or any other action that fails to respect the dignity of the marriage act and the life of newly conceived babies. The Church clearly teaches that every person has a basic human right to be conceived by his parents in their loving marriage act.¹⁶

¹⁵ More on this in Kippley, *NFPTCA*, 68-70.

¹⁶ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Donum Vitae [Gift of Life]*, Instruction on Respect for Human Life in Its Origin and on the Dignity of Procreation: Replies to Certain Questions of the Day, Feb 22, 1987. The *in vitro* process also involves the stimulation of multiple eggs, the fertilization of multiple eggs, and the destruction or freezing of the excess embryos who are, in reality, human persons at their first stage of development. This is not a loving way to treat babies.

3. Birth Control and the Sexual Revolution

A Revolutionary Ecology

Contraception. During the 19th century, there was a movement towards unnatural forms of birth control, and this brought a strong reaction from many Christians. In the USA, various states and the Federal government passed legislation in the 1870s against the promotion and sale of contraceptives. American Catholics at that time had almost no influence in these legislatures; the laws were passed by Protestants. In fact, until 1930, no Christian church accepted contraception as morally permissible. In August of 1930, however, the Church of England abandoned the traditional Christian teaching and accepted unnatural forms of birth control.¹⁷ This was the start of the “Sexual Revolution” in Europe and the Americas. In the 1930 debate in the Church of England, the conservative bishops predicted that the acceptance of marital contraception would lead to the acceptance of sodomy, and how right they were. On December 31, 1930, Pope Pius XI responded on the part of Catholics with a teaching document titled *Casti Connubii* (*Chaste Marriage*) to reaffirm the Christian biblically based teaching against unnatural forms of birth control.

Today, in American culture, there is widespread acceptance of the “mutual consent” liberal opinion that the morality of human sexual behavior has only two criteria: the participants must be of legal age and must give mutual consent. Within those limits, everything is regarded as a matter of personal preference. In such thinking, there is no divinely built-in meaning to human sexuality. Treating sex as just a matter of personal taste is a moral tragedy and is the cause of many of our current social problems including those stemming from poverty. The single greatest source of new poverty is the household headed by a single woman with children.

¹⁷ For the historical context, see John F. Kippley, *Sex and the Marriage Covenant: A Basis for Morality*, Ignatius, 2005, pages 241-251.

4. The Catholic Response

A Moral Ecology

The response of Pope Pius XI in *Casti Connubii* helped many Christians and most Catholics to retain traditional sexual morality. He approved of the use of systematic NFP when couples had a serious need to avoid or postpone pregnancy, and that was helpful to many couples. The invention of hormonal birth control—the Pill—in 1960, however, poured fuel on the flames of the sexual revolution.

On July 25, 1968 Pope Paul VI responded to the push for contraception with *Humanae Vitae*. In this official letter of the Catholic Church, he reaffirmed the Traditional Christian teaching against all unnatural forms of birth control.¹⁸

In section 17 of *Humanae Vitae* the Pope predicted four adverse consequences of the societal acceptance of contraception. He was ridiculed at the time for these predictions, but history has shown that he was an ecological prophet. He predicted 1) increased marital infidelity 2) a general lowering of morality 3) loss of respect for women and 4) government-enforced birth control. The only thing he missed was the acceptance of sodomy as marriage, but at that time such a scenario was not yet imagined. In this teaching document, he explicitly taught about systematic NFP, and in section 26 he encouraged couples to share their knowledge of NFP with others.

Four important realities missed by many. As a young person—Catholic or not—you may be aware that many Catholics for the last 50 years have ignored the actual Catholic teaching against marital contraception that was reaffirmed by *Humanae Vitae*. You might even be aware that a majority of the papal birth control commission

¹⁸ Both *Casti Connubii* and *Humanae Vitae* can be read in English at www.nfpandmore.org/catholicchurch.shtml.

members in 1966 advised the Pope to accept marital contraception. What many folks seem to miss are **four very important realities.**

A. The great moral issue. Those on the papal birth control commission who wanted the Pope to accept marital contraception presented him with a “big picture” morality to justify marital contraception. They argued that acts of marital contraception would take their morality from the non-contraceptive marital acts. They called this the “totality principle.”

Such a principle, however, cannot be restricted to one behavior; it would be applied immediately to other behaviors. Ideas have consequences. For example, the married person away from his or her spouse could argue that his or her acts of adultery could take their morality from the “big picture” of faithful acts when they were both at home. And, of course, the lonely at-home spouse could make the same argument. Morality would thus become just a matter of highly subjective opinions and personal preference. Very bad ideas have very bad consequences.

Pope Paul VI understood this very well. He replied in section 14 of *Humanae Vitae* that the “big picture” morality is totally wrong. Each and every contraceptive act is “intrinsically dishonest.”¹⁹

¹⁹ “To justify marital acts made intentionally sterile, one cannot invoke as valid reasons the lesser evil or the fact that such acts would constitute a whole together with the fertile acts already performed or to follow later and hence would share in one and the same moral goodness.” He affirmed this again in the same paragraph: “Consequently it is an error to think that a marriage act which is deliberately made infertile and so is intrinsically dishonest could be made honest and right by the ensemble of a fertile married life” (*H.V.* #14). In brief, the Pope said that the “big picture” morality is totally wrong; each and every contraceptive act counts and is “intrinsically dishonest.” (*HV* 14)

B. What God has put together. You don't have to be a philosopher or a theologian to consider a few basic questions relevant to the birth control issue. Common sense and intellectual honesty are all that you need to answer the following questions.

First, who put together in one act what we commonly call "making love" and "making babies"? Theists—those who believe that God is still involved with us—have to answer, "God himself put together in one act what we call "making love" and "making babies."

Second, what is contraception except the effort to take apart what God himself has put together? Well, what else? That's precisely what contraceptive behaviors are all about—taking apart what God has put together in the marriage act.

Third, what did Jesus say about marriage? "What God has joined together, let no one put asunder" (Mt 19:6). This is called the indissolubility or inseparability of marriage. As you will see in a few pages, Jesus was responding at the time to a question about divorce in a culture in which divorce had become acceptable.

Lastly, does this teaching of Jesus about the inseparability of marriage apply to the marriage act? Yes. There is no good reason to think it does not apply. The marriage act ought to be a renewal of the faith and the love of your original marriage covenant. What applies to marriage itself applies with equal force to each and every marriage act.

C. How the Pill works. In the early 1960s, there was remarkable ignorance about how the birth control Pill works. European theologians seemed to be especially ignorant and treated the Pill only as a drug that stopped ovulation. Yes, that is one action, but it doesn't always work. A second

action of the Pill is to cause cervical mucus to thicken so that it impedes sperm migration, but that doesn't always work. A third action is that the synthetic hormones of the Pill cause the lining of the uterus to thin, and that may prevent implantation of the embryonic new baby. In brief, when ovulation occurs and sperm migrate and then conception occurs, the Pill can cause a very early abortion. This is the **abortifacient potential** of the Pill, and this makes the Pill morally unusable by any sexually active woman.

Two environmental disasters. The birth control Pill also causes two serious environmental problems. First, the Pill contaminates the water supply. **Natural** female hormones break down once they are excreted. The Pill, however, does not use natural hormones. Drug companies have created **synthetic** hormones that are engineered **not** to break down. After all, they need to survive stomach acids before they get into a woman's blood stream and fertility system. The synthetic hormones are still effective when they are urinated and get into rivers, and that's where they cause sexual abnormalities in fish and other aquatic animals. If you are concerned about the environment, you will not use birth control drugs.

The second environmental disaster occurs in the body of a woman who uses hormonal birth control. The ingredients of the birth control Pill are classified as a Class 1 (worst kind) carcinogen; they **increase a woman's risk of breast cancer.**²⁰ You don't need to take our word for it; a medical doctor and a professor of human biology have written a 22-page booklet titled "Breast Cancer Risks and Prevention."²¹ You will learn much by reading this highly informative small

²⁰ C. Kahlenborn and others, "Oral Contraceptive Use as a Risk Factor for Premenopausal Breast Cancer" Mayo Clinic Proceedings, 81:10, Oct 01 2006. "Conclusion. Use of OCs is associated with an increased risk of premenopausal breast cancer, especially with use before FFTP [First Full-Term Pregnancy] in parous women." [Parous: women who have had a child.]

²¹ <https://www.bcpinstitute.org/resources---books---bc-risk--prevention.html>.

booklet by the Breast Cancer Prevention Institute. It is extremely unwise to use the carcinogenic birth control hormones. That's one reason why we are offering you the healthy, natural forms of birth spacing.

D. Failure to realize the effectiveness of the calendar-temperature system. The fourth reason why many Catholics (and others too) have ignored the teaching of *Humanae Vitae* against unnatural forms of birth control is that they have never been properly informed about the high effectiveness of some forms of natural family planning that were being used **before** the encyclical was issued in July, 1968.

In June 1967, Dr. Gerhardt Doering published a study in which he showed that his Calendar-Temperature method can be used with very high effectiveness. In his study, the couples in Group One used the system conservatively, and they abstained from the marriage act from the start of menstruation until the evening of the third day of well elevated temperatures. That temperature pattern indicated the start of the post-ovulation phase of the cycle. Group One had a 99% level of effectiveness in avoiding pregnancy.

The couples in Group Two engaged in the marriage act not only in the post-ovulation phase of the cycle but also in the early part of the cycle, and a few of these couples had relations in the estimated fertile time. Overall, Group Two had a 97% effectiveness rate.²² It is quite possible that Pope Paul VI was never informed about this research. While *Humanae Vitae* does refer to Church documents dated 1965 and 1966, it does not refer to this 1967 scientific study.

²² You can read the English translation here: <http://nfpandmore.org/Doering-1967-100315.pdf>

5. Christian Marriage as Christian Discipleship

The Ecology of Christian Faith

Christian faith and marriage can be well described as an ecology. Just think about it. Everything you do as a married person affects your spouse and family. Everything you do affects your relationship with the Lord Jesus.

Let's start with you and your intended spouse. Undoubtedly you love each other. You have strong feelings of attraction to each other. You want what is right and good for each other. If someone would try to hurt your intended spouse, you would protect her or him. This love is sometimes captured poetically by words such as "I would walk across the desert and sail the ocean for you." Sometimes, however, the same one who would speak those words before marriage has great difficulty after marriage remembering to take the garbage to the outside trash can. As spouses, you will learn to appreciate the wisdom of St. Paul when he started his verses about love with "Love is patient and kind..." (1Cor 13:4). Be sure to read the entire passage; it's an inspired recipe for a good marriage.

Whatever is good in your relationship with each other comes from God. You, as sons and daughters of Adam and Eve, are made in the image and likeness of God. God himself instituted the relationship of marriage, and it is good. God himself invented the human sexual relationship in which he combined in one act the two realities of marital bonding and co-creating new citizens for his kingdom—what we commonly call making love and making babies, and this too is good. God himself put these good things together and made human sexual activity morally inseparable from the relationship of marriage.

Like Adam and Eve, we are all tempted to think that we can "be like God, knowing good from evil" without looking to God

for his directions (Genesis 3:1-5). Unlike our first parents, however, we have the example of the New Eve—the Blessed Virgin Mary—and her divine Son, Jesus.

The “yes” of Mary. In the biblical Genesis account, Satan first tempted Eve with the huge lie that if she disobeyed God’s command, she would know good and evil by herself without reference to God. She then led Adam into the same sin (Gen 3:1-7). Essentially, Eve didn’t trust God enough to be willing to follow his orders. The temptation of being able to figure out by herself what is right and wrong without reference to God and his plan was too attractive to Eve, and Adam likewise did not have the courage to resist this temptation and to maintain trust and confidence in God.

In the fullness of time, it was the Virgin Mary who gave us the supreme example of trust and confidence in God when she replied to the angel Gabriel, “Be it done to me according to your word” (Luke 1:38). She realized from the words of the angel that the child would be the Messiah, and she certainly knew that many prophets had suffered great rejection and that some were murdered by their own people. Perhaps she had heard of those difficult “suffering servant” passages in the prophet Isaiah (53:1-12) that foretold the passion and death of Jesus. At any rate, when she gave her Yes—“Be it done to me according to your word” (Lk 1:38)—she didn’t know the future. She was making a commitment for better and for worse, just as you will do when you marry.

The love of Christ. Mary gives us the supreme example of faith, and her divine Son Jesus gives us the supreme example of love. He became one of us and taught us how to live and to love, contradicting the materialism of his day and ours. He not only taught us how to love and forgive each other, but he showed us what he meant in his suffering and death on the Cross. He taught us that true religion involves self-giving love, not just ceremonies. At the Last Supper he gave us the New Commandment—to love one another as he

loves us. On trial for his life, he affirmed to the Jewish leadership that he is both Messiah and God, and for that they condemned him to die on the Cross. Then Pilate, the Roman governor, asked him, “Are you the king of the Jews?” and Jesus replied, “You are saying it: I am a king...That is why I was born and why I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice” (John 18:33-37).

Letting Jesus become the King and Center of your life. The most important thing you can do today and every day is to let Jesus truly be the King and Center of your life. That means answering his call to be his disciple. “Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light” (Mt 11:28-30). A disciple of Christ is one who learns from Jesus and follows him.

Why Jesus? Why should I believe in Jesus and be one of his disciples? The brief answer is that Jesus is fully God as well as being fully man. This is the divinely revealed truth which Catholics profess every Sunday at Mass when they profess the Nicene Profession of Faith.

... I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten Son of God, born of the Father before all ages, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father; through him all things were made. For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven, and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became man. For our sake, he was crucified under Pontius Pilate, he suffered death and was buried, and rose again on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures...

Jesus is the visible face of God. He came to teach us the divine truth about human love. He suffered and died to save

you and your intended spouse and all the rest of us from sin and misery. He has given us the road map to holy happiness in this life and for all eternity.

Why do we believe that Jesus is true God and true man?

This faith is based on the promises of the Lord Jesus, his resurrection from the dead, the eyewitness testimony of the Apostles, and the consequent teaching of the Church.

1. First, at the Last Supper Jesus made some awesome promises to the Apostles. Three times he promised that he would send the Holy Spirit who would lead them and their successors into the fullness of the truth.

I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to dwell with you forever, the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him (John 14:16-17).

These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your mind whatever I have said to you (Jn 14:25-26).

I have yet many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth... He will glorify me, because he will receive what is mine and declare it to you (Jn 16:12-13a, 14).

2. Second, Jesus rose from the dead. The Apostles, except for John, deserted him at his crucifixion. Yet, 52 days later they were openly proclaiming that he is risen from the dead and that they had seen him with their own eyes! They went out to the entire then-known world preaching this message. Aside from John (who died in exile) they were all put to death for their witness to the risen Christ. These men were not naturally zealous. Right after the Resurrection but before the Holy Spirit at Pentecost empowered them, they were more interested in fishing than preaching. They were

ordinary men who were transformed by what they had witnessed and by the command of the Lord Jesus to preach the Gospel to the whole world. After receiving the gifts of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, they spent the rest of their lives in preaching what they had seen and heard.

The importance of the Resurrection is made clear by the Apostle Paul who wrote emphatically in his first letter to the Corinthians: "If Christ has not risen, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain... If Christ has not risen, your faith is in vain for you are still in your sins" (1Cor 15:14, 17). There has never been a Christian monument honoring the bones of Jesus. We have many monuments honoring the bones of the saints, but none for Jesus. We honor only his empty tomb.

The role of gratitude. Gratitude is at the heart of being human. If we do someone a favor, especially one that is inconvenient for us, and if we never get any sort of thanks, it hurts, and rightly so. Gratitude is at the heart of being a Christian. If someone wears the Christian label but is not truly grateful for what the Lord Jesus has done for us, such a person needs to put his or her heart in order.

The call to discipleship. Your most important job in life is to pursue true happiness and get yourself to heaven. Your next most important job is to get your spouse and children to heaven. But you cannot do it alone. At the Last Supper Jesus told us, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father but by me" (Jn 14:6).

He calls us to be his disciples and teaches us how. "If anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it; but he who loses his life for my sake will save it. For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world but ruins or loses himself?" (Lk 9:23-25). Jesus gave himself

totally for us; he calls us to give ourselves totally to him. Only Jesus, true God and true man, can talk that way. The reward is peace and inner happiness in this life and life with Jesus for all eternity.

The alternative—the refusal to accept his call—is summed up in the phrase “lonely as hell,” hating yourself and everyone else for all eternity. For certain, God does not want that for us, but he will not force us. Jesus saves us, but not without our cooperation. It is in this context that we are called to believe and accept the call of Jesus to discipleship and true happiness and to live out his teaching about love, marriage, and sexuality.

The permanence of marriage. One of the great blessings that the Lord Jesus has given us is his teaching that true marriage is for life—“until death do we part.” This is completely different from the current American legal treatment of marriage. The laws of the United States have given us “no-fault” divorce, a situation that enables either party to obtain a divorce no matter what the circumstances were at the start of their marriage. And in this legal system, the divorced parties are legally free to enter a second marriage, or a third one, etc. Contemporary American law does not offer lifelong security, but God’s law does.

Christian marriage is based on the explicit teaching of Jesus. Before reading the following account, please realize that among the Jews of that time, there was a common agreement that a man could divorce his wife and be free to remarry, but there was a difference about what reasons could justify a divorce. One party thought that the reasons had to be serious; the other party thought that **any** cause would be sufficient. The opening question in the following passage reflects that dispute.

Some Pharisees came to him, testing him and saying, “Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for any reason?” He

answered and said to them, “Have you not read that the Creator, from the beginning, made them male and female, and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh? Therefore now they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man put asunder.’”

They said to him, “Why then did Moses command one to give a written notice of dismissal, and to put her away?” He said to them, “Because of the hardness of your heart, Moses permitted you to put away your wives; but it was not so from the beginning. And I say to you, that whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity²³, and marries another, commits adultery; and he who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.”

His disciples said to him, “If that is the case of a man with his wife, it is not expedient to marry,” (Mt 19:3-10; see also Mt 5:31-32; Mk 10:2-12).

Note how much the disciples were a part of their culture. “Better not to marry than to be stuck with one spouse for life!” Obviously, they had to change their thinking.

The Catholic Church cannot change the clear teaching of Jesus. It is a great blessing to realize that you and your intended will be united in a marriage that lasts “until death do us part.” It is also somewhat scary, but that simply means that you and your intended spouse need to be open with each other and to live holy lives right now. If one of you can’t stand being around a person who takes the Catholic faith seriously and is striving for holiness, now is the time to find out. There is nothing more important about any person than what that person believes about the important realities of life.

If your intended spouse has a problem with alcohol or other drugs or has a horrible temper, and so forth, the time to get healing is well before your proposed marriage. People who won’t change their lives for “the better” before marriage are

²³ “Unchastity” here refers to couples living in an invalid marriage.

even less likely to change after marriage. One of the purposes of good preparation for marriage is to help couples **not** to enter marriages which are either not true, or not valid, or can be foreseen to be a disaster just waiting to happen. It is part of a priest's obligation and privilege to do what he can to help you on the way to heaven. If he is requiring you to do certain things that are aimed at helping you to prepare for a lifelong happy marriage and to grow in faith and holiness, it is because he wants to see both of you in heaven.

For Better AND for Worse. It is tremendously important to realize that when you marry, you commit yourselves to each other for better and for worse. The word "and" is crucial. You do not marry for better OR for worse.

A speaker to groups of married couples will sometimes ask this question. "Have you ever had feelings about your spouse that were so unhappy that you thought that if you had those feelings six weeks before the wedding there would not have been a wedding?" This unhappy feeling is not uncommon, at least once, and sometimes more than once, in many marriages, even very good ones.

So, what should you do if this happens? Go see the priest who prepared you for marriage. Or any sound priest. Explain the situation. You can be sure that he has heard it before. Somewhere along the line you probably have heard that if you are discussing something your spouse does or doesn't do, don't accuse him or her. Instead, try this. "When you do that," and express your feelings. It may be trite but it's still true that when you point a finger at someone, three of your fingers are pointing back at you.

Review once again the famous recipe for a happy marriage given us by St. Paul, and note how it starts: "Love is patient and kind." Then it continues: "Love is not jealous or boastful. It is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful..." (1Cor 13:4-5).

6. Love, Marriage, Sexuality and Meaning

The Covenant Ecology

Christian marriage: a covenant, not just a contract. Christian marriage can be properly understood only in the context of the biblical covenant. A covenant is radically different from a contract. In a contract, the parties agree to certain limited things including how mutual consent can end the contract. A covenant in the biblical sense is unlimited and permanent. In the Gospel account in the previous section, Jesus pointed out that the covenant of marriage between Adam and Eve was permanent. When the Jews ignored it, Moses tried to alleviate the position of the wife who was divorced and left in a position of a yoyo that could be called back by the jerk of a string. So, the divorcing husband had to give her a written statement that he had no further right to her.

But Jesus elevated marriage to a sacrament and eliminated divorce altogether. He affirmed the permanence of natural marriage by reaffirming the permanence of God's original plan for marriage. In God's plan, the ecology of marriage is certainly intended to be a mutually beneficial relationship. Beneficial for the spouses, for their children, and for God! Yes, God wants his family members to follow his way on earth so they will be with Him in heaven for eternity.

Is there a divinely built-in meaning to the human sexual act? Yes. The human sexual act is a vitally important act because it is the natural means of making babies and expressing marital commitment. It is the act by which those in the covenant of marriage are called to carry out the first commandment of the Bible: "Be fruitful and multiply" (Genesis 1:28). It is the act by which the family is started.

Sacred Scripture makes it clear that sexual intercourse is meant to be ***uniquely*** a ***marriage*** act. It's a God-given act that is morally good only within marriage. The Bible teaches

this very clearly in a negative way: it condemns every other form of having sex. In alphabetical order, adultery, bestiality, fornication, incest, prostitution, rape, sodomy, and withdrawal are all condemned. Withdrawal-and-ejaculation is the sin of Onan (or Onanism) described in Genesis 38:6-10. Masturbation, whether solitary or mutual, is a form of Onanism. Only the complete sexual act of union between a male human and a female human who are truly married to each other can be morally good.²⁴ The other actions are essentially dishonest because they are not true marriage acts.

The positive meaning of the human sexual act: a renewal of the marriage covenant. In God's plan for love, marriage and sexuality, the act of sexual intercourse has a unique and holy place. It is a unique privilege and right of marriage for husband and wife to engage in sexual intercourse. This is so much a part of the biblical tradition that traditional Christian theology calls it ***the marriage act***. The biblically based meaning of the marriage act can be summarized very briefly: **Sexual intercourse is intended by God to be, at least implicitly, a renewal of the marriage covenant.**

In that sentence, the words "at least implicitly" are important. Spouses are not required to be thinking explicitly in these terms. However, they do well to think about what they have done in marrying each other. God himself built the covenant meaning into the marriage act. In God's plan, the marriage act says, "We take each other once again in caring love for better and for worse till death do us part." Spouses would do well to realize that in the marriage act, they are called to renew the faith and commitment and caring love that they pledged on their wedding day. St. John Paul II put it this way:

²⁴ This is explained more thoroughly in J. Kippley, *Sex and the Marriage Covenant: A Basis for Morality*, especially chapters 1-4.

In the conjugal act, husband and wife are called to confirm the mutual gift of self which they have made to each other in the marriage covenant.”²⁵

The covenant meaning of the marriage act is a positive statement of what the human sexual act ought to be. Some couples wonder why a physical action that is sinful before marriage can be morally good after marriage. The covenant meaning makes it clear. Outside of marriage, the sexual act is simply not a marriage act. In fact, it is a grave sin because it falsifies the divinely built-in meaning of the act. Thus, it is the biblical sin of fornication or adultery as noted previously. Within marriage, the sexual act can be—and ought to be—a beautiful symbolic renewal of their faith and commitment and their for-better-and-for-worse caring love for each other. At the least, their sexual acts should not contradict this God-given meaning of the marriage act.

Caring love. If you love another person, you want what is good for that person. In fact, the purpose of every human relationship is to help the other person on the way to heaven, at least in the sense of not impeding that person’s salvation. If you love a person, the last thing you want to do is to lead that person into sin and away from heaven. If you love a person as a future spouse to whom you are going to pledge permanent caring love, you also should want what is best for her or him right now.

The practical meaning of this is that if you have been engaging in sex outside of marriage, you need to realize that such actions are seriously sinful. They are dishonest in terms of the marriage covenant and are the opposite of true love. Thus, you will stop such actions and be chaste. Your future marriage will be better if you prepare for it now with loving chastity. Again, remember how St. Paul describes

²⁵ Pope John Paul II, *Letter to Families from Pope John Paul II*, 1994, n. 12.

love, “Love is patient, and love is kind...”²⁶ This applies to every form of love. Lust is extremely impatient; love is patient and can wait. You have a need and a right to know this part of God’s plan for love, marriage, and sexuality.

Within marriage, verbal expressions of love are important. Every day, find something for which to compliment or thank your spouse. (One of us learned this at a secular business conference.) Be a building-up spouse. Put-downs may be funny in a comedy act, but they are not at all funny for the spouse who is the butt of such alleged humor.

The call to generosity in having children. The first commandment given to Adam and Eve was “Be fruitful and multiply...” (Genesis 1:28). This commandment has not been revoked. Catholic teaching is very clear that married couples are called to be generous in having children and raising them in the ways of the Lord. In his *Letter to Families* quoted above, St. John Paul II continued:

“The logic of the total gift of self to the other involves a potential openness to procreation: in this way the marriage is called to even greater fulfillment as a family.”²⁷

This is the traditional teaching of the Church affirmed by Vatican Council II, recent Popes, and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

NFP and the call to generosity. Systematic Natural Family Planning (NFP) is not “Catholic birth control.” Sections 10 through 16 of *Humanae Vitae* clearly teach that couples are called to live by the natural law and that contraceptive behaviors are morally wrong. The Church also teaches that married couples may use systematic NFP to avoid or

²⁶ 1 Corinthians 13:4-7. Once again, this is a tried and true recipe for marital love and happiness.

²⁷ *Letter to Families from Pope John Paul II*, n. 12.

postpone pregnancy if they have a sufficiently serious reason to do so.

Baby spacing with Ecological Breastfeeding does not require “sufficiently serious reasons.” The delay in the return of fertility with Ecological Breastfeeding is just a natural side effect of the God-created mother-baby ecology explained in the first chapter of this book.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches that spouses have the “duty to make certain that their desire [for spacing or avoidance] **is not motivated by selfishness** but is in conformity with the generosity appropriate to responsible parenthood” (CCC 2368).

Mere replacement of the parents requires 2.1 children per fertile-age woman. Therefore, the two-child family cannot be the norm. Catholics who have three or more children will keep Catholic churches and schools open. For the good of your family and the good of the Church, we encourage you to be generous in having children.

Marital morality. The “method” for avoiding pregnancy with systematic NFP is chaste abstinence during the fertile time. When couples abstain from the marriage act, for whatever reason, they may be tempted to engage in sexual immorality during the fertile time. When you are so tempted, don’t feel sorry for yourself; you are not alone.

Experience indicates that some so-called “NFP” couples engage in sinful behaviors. For example, a woman called our NFP office and asked if we had a priest on staff. Since we didn’t, she told us her story. She and her husband had been practicing mutual masturbation during the fertile time. They had taken an NFP course in which nothing was said about this, and they had been doing this for eight years. Then she read our book on NFP where she learned that the Church teaches that masturbation is immoral. She was

repentant and wanted to go to Confession by phone because she was so active in her parish that she knew the priest would recognize her voice. She was happy to hear the advice to confess to a priest in another parish where she was not known.

In another case, a married man who was using his own form of “NFP” was trying to persuade another married man to practice “NFP” and told him that it’s okay to masturbate during the fertile time. The other gentleman told him, “That’s immoral.” The first man and his wife were self-taught using an NFP manual written by us, but they told us later they had “skipped the chapters on the moral aspect and what made NFP different from contraceptive methods.”²⁸ They repented and later became NFP teachers.

In 2014, an email writer had recently read our NFP manual and was surprised to find that the Church teaches that masturbation and other activities are immoral. She said that she and her husband had taken a different NFP course 23 years previously, had never heard anything about such behaviors, and had been practicing fertile-time immorality for that entire time. They changed their behavior.

What does the Church teach? *Humanae Vitae* teaches clearly on these matters. In section 14, it first condemns abortion. Then it continues:

Equally to be condemned, as the magisterium of the Church has affirmed on many occasions, is direct sterilization, whether of the man or of the woman, whether permanent or temporary. Similarly excluded is any action which either before, at the moment of, or after sexual intercourse, is specifically intended to prevent procreation—whether as an end or as a means.

²⁸ “Mr. B: used ‘NFP’ wrongly,” *Natural Family Planning: The Complete Approach (NFPTCA)*, 2018, 122-123..

What are those behaviors intended to prevent procreation? To show that it does not take much space to teach these things, we quote from our NFP manual as follows:

- “● Barrier methods such as condoms, diaphragms, foams, and jellies
- The intrauterine device (IUD)
- Hormonal forms of birth control (the Pill, Shot, Patch, implants)
- Masturbation, whether mutual or singular
- Withdrawal and ejaculation (Onanism)
- Marital sodomy (anal sex and oral sex)”.²⁹

Why does our NFP text mention the unpleasant topics of masturbation and marital sodomy? Very simply, it's because we listen and read. People have told us about their immoral behaviors as indicated above. We have read in a newspaper article that in some parts of the United States about half of high school teenagers have experienced oral sex. It takes no genius to figure out that if they should attend an NFP course and hear about “abstinence” during the fertile time, they may start thinking in terms of their previous behavior unless they learn that it's immoral. *Chaste* abstinence is the pregnancy-avoiding ‘method’ of true systematic NFP.³⁰ You have a moral need and a God-given right to know the sexual morality that applies to marriage.

Serious matter. A sin is mortal when it has serious matter, is known to be serious, and is deliberately done. How can mutually voluntary sexual behaviors be the serious matter of mortal sin? If such actions contradict God's plan for love and sexuality, that makes them sinful. To be sure, there can be seriously adverse health and social consequences to actions such as adultery, fornication, incest, and prostitution, but those consequences are not the main reason for their moral

²⁹ NFPTCA, 18

³⁰ NFPTCA, 19

evil. The prime reason is that God is Love—not just the love for good feelings, but a tremendously self-giving love. As people who are followers of the Lord Jesus, we are called to love as God loves. As St. John the Apostle and evangelist wrote:

Beloved, let us love one another; for love is from God. And everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God; for God is love. In this has the love of God been shown in our case, that God has sent his only-begotten Son into the world, so that we may live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he has first loved us and sent his Son as a propitiation³¹ for our sins. Beloved, if God has so loved us, we also ought to love one another” (1John 4:7-11).

God’s plan for how we ought to love one another stems from his infinite love for us. It includes love of every rightly ordered kind. In his plan, sexual acts ought to be acts of true, self-giving love that reflect and renew the marriage covenant he created for us. With that understanding of the meaning of sexual love, it is not difficult to see that non-covenant acts are essentially dishonest. They contradict the meaning that God has given to the sexual act, and that’s very serious. Most of us are somewhat broken, so the same loving God who has given us the Commandment to love one another has also given us the call to repentance and the sacrament of penance. He has also given us the great gift of spiritual nourishment—the Body and Blood of Christ in the Holy Eucharist.

³¹ Propitiation: an act gaining God’s mercy for us sinners.

7. Fertility Awareness

The Female Ecology

The pregnancy-breastfeeding cycle. As you saw in Chapter 1 on the Mother-Baby Ecology, when a mother practices Ecological Breastfeeding, she normally has an extended duration of breastfeeding amenorrhea (no periods). Thus, she has a full cycle of fertility, pregnancy, breastfeeding infertility, and resumed fertility. With Ecological Breastfeeding, this major cycle takes about two years, on average, with both shorter and longer such cycles.

The periodic cycle. If a couple seeks to avoid pregnancy by practicing chaste abstinence during the fertile time, the woman experiences a more-or-less monthly cycle. This periodic cycle typically has the following pattern. The cycle starts with menstruation and typically a few days of preovulation low fertility. That merges into the fertile time which starts several days before ovulation and ends a few days after ovulation. Ovulation is the release of a woman's egg from an ovary into the Fallopian tube where conception can take place. Next comes post-ovulation infertility, and then menstruation starts the next cycle. In very general terms, this cycle typically takes about a month. All of this is controlled by her hormones, principally estrogen and progesterone.

All the common signs of fertility and infertility. Systematic NFP is based on the observation of the female signs of fertility. God made the fertility of women much more interesting than that of men. Men are constantly fertile from puberty onward unless they suffer from some sort of abnormality or disease. Women, however, have a three-phase fertility cycle. God made woman in such a way that she can observe certain signs that tell her when she is fertile or infertile. Observing one or more of these signs is the essence of modern fertility awareness. Our NFP manual,

Natural Family Planning: The Complete Approach,³² teaches Systematic NFP using two or three signs in a cross-checking way. Even our students with nursing and medical educations are surprised at how much they learn from this manual. That's because we have put things together in a very practical way. What follows here is not intended to be a short course on fertility awareness but just an introduction.

The uterus. The uterus is the fist-sized organ in which a baby develops. In each periodic cycle, the lining of the uterus (the endometrium) builds up to prepare for pregnancy and then is shed (menstruation) in the absence of pregnancy. We typically call the first day of menstruation "Day 1" of the cycle only because it is such a visible marker.

Cervical mucus. The cervix is the lower end of the uterus. Before ovulation, under the influence of rising estrogen levels, the cervix secretes mucus for several days; cervical mucus aids sperm life and sperm migration. After ovulation, cervical mucus generally disappears in a few days as estrogen decreases and progesterone increases.

The cervix. Before ovulation the cervix rises slightly, the mouth of the cervix opens and becomes softer. After ovulation, these signs reverse themselves. The cervix comes down, closes, and becomes firm.

Temperature. A third valuable sign is a woman's resting body temperature; this is called her basal body temperature (BBT). A few days before ovulation, high levels of estrogen tend to lower the BBT. Shortly after ovulation, rising levels of progesterone cause her basal body temperature to rise. The BBT stays higher for some days and then drops as progesterone falls at the time of menstruation.

³² NFPTCA, Chapters 2 and 3, 27-58.

The temperature sign is a simple, very inexpensive, and highly accurate way of determining important information about fertility and infertility. It also provides an extremely valuable certainty about pregnancy and gestational age.³³ It can also get the husband involved by his recording the daily temperatures.

Different systems of fertility awareness. In the Sympto-Thermal Method, the temperature sign crosschecks the mucus sign. The cervical changes can be used as well. We prefer teaching this system so you can make informed choices about which sign or signs you want to use. You can't choose something unless you know about it.

Equally effective? In the mid-1970s the Human Life Foundation, established by the United States Bishops in 1968, persuaded the National Institutes of Health to conduct an independent comparative study of two systems of Natural Family Planning. The results showed that the cross-checking Sympto-Thermal Method was more effective for avoiding pregnancy than the mucus-only system.³⁴ You have a right to know all the signs of fertility and the relative user-effectiveness of different systems. And, of course, you have a right to learn the many benefits of Ecological Breastfeeding.

³³ NFPTCA, 70.

³⁴ Maclyn E. Wade, Phyllis McCarthy, et al., "A Randomized Prospective Study of the Use-Effectiveness of Two Methods of Natural Family Planning," *Am J. Ob. and Gyn* 141-4 (Oct 15, 1981) 368-376.

The Last Word

This book is an effort to help you understand the various natural and moral ecologies in which married couples live. In the context of those ecologies, we have tried to explain the teaching of the Catholic Church. Some of that teaching is counter-cultural, but that should not be surprising. The Lord Jesus was so counter-cultural in his day that the leaders of that culture crucified him. Nevertheless, he commanded his apostles to continue his work. The gospel of Matthew records these as his last words before ascending into heaven:

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and behold, I am with you all days, even unto the end of the world (Mt 28:19-20).

Jesus continues to keep that promise even though Western culture has largely rejected his teaching about love, marriage, and sexuality. A large part of our culture idolizes sex in every form except permanent and fruitful marriage. Thus, Jesus in his mystical body—the Church—is counter-cultural.

The Church has no real choice in the matter. It is obliged to continue to teach as the Lord Jesus has commanded. He is “the Way, the Truth and the Life” (Jn 14:6). The Lord Jesus calls us to the way of the daily cross. “If anyone wants to come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me” (Lk 9:23). He came to teach us the divine truth about human love. Living that truth is the key to happiness in this world as well as the key to heaven.

If a priest (or a bishop or deacon) asked you to read this book, he did so for several reasons. First, he loves you and wants to see you in heaven. Second, he also wants you to

reflect on how much the Lord Jesus loves you. Third, the good priest also wants to carry out the great commission of the Lord—teaching you to know and observe all the Lord's teachings.

Priests also know through experience with many couples that those who follow the Way of the Lord have much happier marriages. The informed priest also wants you to know the practical things about Ecological Breastfeeding and Systematic NFP. He certainly wants what is best for you and your babies.

Please pray for your priests. They are on the front lines of the culture wars. For the good of your family and the good of the Church, we encourage you to be generous in having children.

We, the authors, are ordinary lay people. We are not employed by the Catholic Church. We have been blessed with helpful information from others. We want to share it with you, and we hope that you will share it with others.

To help you learn the whole picture about systematic NFP, Ecological Breastfeeding and relevant Catholic teaching, we have developed a very complete Home Study Course. It's also economical. It consists of several tests which are based on readings in *Natural Family Planning: The Complete Approach*. The NFPI Home Study Course is conducted by email, and a personal test corrector makes sure that you understand the material. For more information, go to the Home Page of NFPI below. Student evaluations greatly encourage us to recommend it to you.

May God bless you and your marriage.

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