

American Academy of Fertility Care Professionals

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By Bishop Victor Galeone

I rarely agree with Ellen Goodman – the syndicated columnist who sometimes appears in our local newspaper. But last May, Ms. Goodman got it right.

She candidly admitted that those on the religious right are correct when they say that same-sex marriage is proof of the crisis in traditional marriage. She's quick to add, however: "But gay marriage is not the cause of the crisis – it's a consequence of it."

And she's right. Since 1960, three specific factors have contributed to the demise of traditional marriage as we've known it for almost 2,000 years:

1. Separating sex from procreation – through effective contraception.
2. Condoning cohabitation for couples – which stands at well over 65%.
3. Granting no-fault divorces – whereby 50% of all marriages are dissolved.

Gone are the days when the minister or priest at a wedding had to be sure to give the married couple a signed copy of the marriage license – before they left on their honeymoon. You see, weddings are no longer needed to give a man and woman society's permission to have sex and procreate.

No – today, weddings have become mostly symbolic. For the majority of couples, weddings are a convenient way to make a legal contract that regulates property rights, inheritance, and a few other benefits.

As a Methodist minister expressed it last year: "If society has abandoned regulating the *heterosexual* conduct of men and women, what right does it have to regulate their *homosexual* conduct, including the regulation of their legal and property relationship with one another?"

Yes, sadly – reluctantly I must agree with Ellen Goodman: same-sex marriage is *not causing* the deterioration of marriage; it's the *result* of it.

And we religious leaders should bear much of the blame for this deplorable situation.

During the last four decades, we have been little more than mute shepherds, allowing the wolves of a secular culture to wreck havoc on our people.

The ordination of an openly gay bishop two years ago was only the grand finale of what began back in 1930. That was the year the Anglican Church became the first Christian body in history to sanction the use of birth control.

Years ago Bishop Fulton Sheen stated the two horns of our present dilemma: "We are either a little lower than the angels, or a little higher than the animals."

The license tag of a Planned Parenthood employee opted for the latter. It read: “FIX EM.” That may be an acceptable solution for our cats and dogs – but not for human beings, created in the image of God.

I plan to focus the rest of my talk on the first of Bishop Sheen’s options: “We’ve been created just a little lower than the angels.”

One of the gifts I received last Christmas was a copy of the best seller, *The Purpose-Driven Life*. As I read it, the thought occurred to me that the author had merely elaborated – and very effectively – what Catholics of past generations had learned in answering the second question of the Baltimore Catechism: “Why did God make me?” – “God made me to know him, to love him, and to serve him in this world, so that I could be happy with him forever in the next.” “...so that I could be happy...” Image that! We were created for happiness. Whatever we do in life – or fail to do – is an attempt to be happy. Even the poor wretch that blows his brains out is looking for happiness. He’s simply trying to end the living hell that’s causing all his misery.

Now God doesn’t want us to be happy just in heaven – He wants us to be happy here on earth as well. Take the account of creation in the opening chapters of Genesis. At the end of each day of creation, like a tom-tom beating in the background, the sacred author repeats, “And God saw that it was good.”

On the last day of creation – after completing the whole of the material universe – God, like a master craftsman, creates the peak of his visible creation – our first parents.

The book of Genesis gives two separate accounts of the creation of man – each highlighting the twofold purpose of marriage: namely, to communicate life and love.

The first account occurs in chapter one. There we are told that God created us in His own image and likeness: “...male and female he created them...” and then God adds the first command in the entire Bible: “Be fertile and multiply....” So the first purpose of marriage is to give life.

In the second account of creation – in chapter two, we learn that the other purpose God has for marriage is that it be love-giving: “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make him a helpmate as his partner.” God meant husband and wife to be intimate friends, supporting each other in mutual and lasting love.

We thus see that God made us sexual for two reasons. First, to produce a family on which all human society is built. For this, the love embrace must be life-giving. The second reason for the sexual union is to bind husband and wife more intimately together in their mutual love for each other. That is, the love embrace must be love-giving.

Some would add a third reason for the marital union – and for most of our contemporaries, the most important of all: sexual pleasure, or in today’s parlance, “good sex.”

No – the Bible does not frown on sexual pleasure, as several passages in the Song of Songs make quite explicit. But as St. Thomas Aquinas points out, physical pleasure is not meant to be an end in itself, but only the means to an end – namely, to facilitate wholesome activities.

So in his wisdom, God attached physical pleasure to the wholesome activities of eating and procreating. For example, God could easily have fashioned our stomachs like the engine of a car. In which case, instead of slowly savoring that luscious filet mignon for supper, we could dispense with the whole affair by guzzling down a pint of high-test. But no! – God wanted us to be happy – even in this life. So he fashioned our palates and our sexual organs to be sources of pleasure.

But physical pleasure must never become an end in itself – for when it does, we are on the road to addiction. And the lust for pleasure ultimately leads to self-destruction. Sexual pleasure, then, is good – and oh so good – when it promotes and is controlled by the twofold purpose of sex, namely, to communicate life and love. Serving these two purposes, it can be richly enjoyed. Separated from these two purposes, it becomes addictive and degrading.

But what is the relation between these two basic purposes of our sexuality? Not too long ago, moral theologians gave priority to the life-giving purpose of marriage, while seeming to minimize its love-giving purpose. But since the Gospel puts the primary emphasis on love, theologians began asking how married love – which is a reflection of God’s love for us – could be subordinated to any other goal, even the survival of the species. So recently, the Church has been speaking of the two ends of marriage as coequal and inseparable.

Inseparable! The two purposes of marriage are so interrelated as to be inseparable. Let’s examine why.

First, recall how Jesus ruled out the possibility of divorce by quoting from Genesis: “They are no longer two but one flesh.” To which he immediately added, “Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one ever separate.” In other words, husband and wife form a living organism, like head and heart – not a mechanical one, like lock and key. So the separation of the head or heart from the body – unlike the removal of a key from its lock – entails the death of the organism. And that’s just what takes place in divorce – the death of a pulsating, nuptial organism.

Furthermore, God was also the one who combined in one and the same marital act its love-giving and life-giving aspects. So we can no more separate the twofold purpose of the marital act through *contraception*, than we can separate the union of husband and wife through *divorce*. “What God has joined together, let no one ever separate.”

Now let’s consider how God designed married love to be expressed in a special language – the body language of the marital union. In fact, sexual communication uses the same terms as verbal communication:

Intercourse: Until the early 1900s, this word simply meant “to carry on a conversation.”

To know: In Shakespeare’s day this verb was a euphemism for “having sexual relations.”

To conceive: still applies to both sexual and verbal communication.

With this in mind, let's pose two questions:

- Is it normal for a wife to insert ear-plugs while listening to her husband?
- Is it normal for a husband to muffle his mouth while speaking to his wife?

These examples are so abnormal as to appear absurd. Yet if such behavior is abnormal for verbal communication, why, during sexual communication, do we tolerate a wife using a *diaphragm* or *the Pill*, or a husband employing a *condom*?

Worse still, how can we justify a husband having a surgeon clip his robust vocal cords, or a wife having her healthy eardrums surgically removed? In the area of sexual communication how does a vasectomy or a tubal ligation differ from such horrific examples?

Shouldn't a surgeon remove an organ only when it's diseased and threatens human life? If the ovaries or testes are not diseased, on what grounds are we frustrating their purpose? Could it be that we now consider children a disease, from which we must immunize ourselves through sterilization?

How far we've drifted from the Body Language of the sexual act as God intended it! He meant the love union between husband and wife to reflect his own inner life, namely, the love union between the Father and the Son, which is the person of the Holy Spirit.

Through Jesus, God revealed himself to us as a loving Trinity of Persons: From all eternity, God the Father conceived the second person, his eternal Word. The mutual love between these two persons is the third person, the Holy Spirit, "who proceeds from the Father and the Son," as Catholics pray in the Creed every Sunday.

God is seen as more loving and loveable just because he is this generous Trinity, rather than an all-powerful bachelor, pleading for our companionship. We don't have a lonely God, forced through boredom to create other beings to keep him company. This makes creation all the more astounding. God did not have to do it. When he acts, he can only share. He cannot act selfishly, like a miser snatching up coins of goodness.

More to the point of our topic, God created us in his own image and likeness. So in our love relationship, he wants us to reflect his own self-giving love. From beginning to end, the Bible is a love story. It begins in Genesis with the marriage of Adam and Eve in the garden and it ends in the book of Revelation with the wedding feast of the Lamb – the marriage of Christ and his bride, the Church.

From all eternity God desired to join himself to us in a nuptial embrace of love. No one expressed that fact more graphically than the prophet Isaiah:

"As a young man marries a maiden, so will you Maker marry you. As a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you."

Since God fashioned our bodies male and female to communicate both life and love, whenever husband and wife frustrate this twofold purpose through contraception, they're acting out a lie: The body language of the love embrace says, "I'm *all yours – totally!*" But the contraceptive device adds, "*except* for my fertility." Even worse, they're usurping the role of God. By thwarting the purpose of the marital act, they're telling God: "You may have designed our bodies to help you transmit life to an immortal soul, but you made a mistake – a mistake we intend to correct. We acknowledge you as the Lord of our lives – but not of our fertility."

José Buliff, a physician, expressed this same theme in this marvelous passage: "Contraception corrupts authentic human sexuality, damaging family life at its root. Sex is meant to be an intimate *dialogue*, a full, uncompromising, uninhibited exchange between a man and a woman – a tie that truly binds. With their dialogue, the couple creates a new word, a new idea never before expressed: a new human life."

"Contraception makes sex a *monologue*. The only word uttered is a monotone, a resounding me. Contraceptive sex is monotonous, because nothing truly new and exciting emerges from it. When new life is squeezed out of sex, the source of its vitality and meaning withers and dies. Sex becomes mechanical and quickly ages." (*The Philadelphia Inquirer*, May 2, 2000)

The Church has always taught that contraception is intrinsically wrong. As I pointed out earlier, it wasn't until 1930 that it became a strictly "Catholic thing." Until then all Christian bodies – including the Protestant reformers Luther, Calvin and Knox – taught that contraception was "intrinsically evil."

Today most people feel that giving up contraception is impossible – it would cause everyone to have a dozen or more children. Not so! First, God gave us an inbuilt means of child spacing – breastfeeding. As an adult, I learned from my mother that she had breastfed us children for two full years. My grandmother had taught her that this was God's way to delay another pregnancy.

But what of those women who can't breastfeed, or whose fertility tends to return sooner? Or what if a couple has a serious reason to avoid another pregnancy? In all these cases couples must still respect the inseparable link that God established between the twofold purpose of the sexual union: *making love* and *making babies*.

There is a morally acceptable way for couples to do this: Natural Family Planning. (NFP) Couples, properly motivated, may regulate births by abstaining from the marital act during the Wife's fertile period. It's the task of NFP instructors to teach couples how to identify the fertile days, which can last anywhere from seven to ten days per cycle. Furthermore, there are a number of benefits in using NFP:

- It's scientifically sound (unlike the old rhythm method).
- It involves no harmful side effects.
- It promotes communication between the spouses
- It entails no cost, after the initial purchase of materials.
- It's as effective as the Pill in postponing pregnancy, when properly followed.
- It decreases the likelihood of divorce. (Anecdotal evidence suggests less than 5% of NFP users divorce, as opposed to 50% of those on contraceptives.)

Now let's address some questions:

1. *Why all the fuss, if NFP and contraception both have the same objective—namely to avoid a pregnancy?*

To answer this question, one must realize that a good motive never justifies using an immoral means to achieve a goal. For example, two couples want to support their families. The first does it through legitimate employment, the other by trafficking in drugs. Two persons want to lose weight: The first person achieves it through a strict diet; the other by bingeing and purging. Or to return to our analogy of the language of the body: To say that NFP is no different than contraception is to say that maintaining silence is the same thing as telling a lie.

2. *Provided that a couple's marriage is open to children on the whole, why be concerned about an occasional use of contraception?*

Would the questioner also argue that provided husband and wife intend to remain faithful to each other *on the whole*, why be concerned about an *occasional* act of adultery?

3. *Isn't conscience supposed to be the final arbiter of our conduct? And doesn't the Church say that we're supposed to follow our conscience?*

Yes, we are supposed to follow our conscience – provided that it's a *properly formed* conscience. That means, just as we must adjust our clocks to sun time (Greenwich Mean Time), so too, we must conform our consciences to the natural law and the Ten Commandments. If a clock goes too fast or too slow, it will soon tell us that it's bedtime at dawn. And to say we must submit our conscience to behavior that clearly contradicts God's law is to say that we must rule our lives by the clock even when it tells us that it's daytime in the dead of night.

To wrap things up, recall that just a few years before the sexual revolution of the 60s, there were only two venereal diseases: syphilis and gonorrhea, and both were treatable with drugs. Today, there are more than 50 sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), many of which have no known treatment, and some of which can be fatal. Billions of dollars have been spent in search of a cure for the worst of these diseases, but so far without success.

Yet there is a way to prevent all STDs – and it doesn't cost a penny. What is it? *Abstain from all sexual activity before marriage, and be faithful to your spouse after marriage.*

The truth of this statement is irrefutable. And it proves the old adage: "Good morals make for good medicine."

But such talk is unthinkable in a society where condoms are freely given to high school students, and whose only creed is: "Thou shalt be free to hook up with whomever and howsoever often thou chooseth – For thou art only a little higher than the animals." The flip side of the adage I referred to a moment ago is also true: "Bad morals make for bad medicine."

Back in the 1930s Mahatma Gandhi wrote an essay on *Brahmacharya*, the virtue of chastity. I quote from that essay:

“If adultery and prostitution disappeared, at least half of the present number of doctors would find their occupation gone. So inextricably indeed has venereal disease caught mankind in its clutches that thoughtful medical men have been forced to admit, that so long as adultery and prostitution continue, there is no hope for the human race, all the discoveries of curative medicine notwithstanding. The medicine for these diseases are so poisonous, that although they may appear to have done some good for the time being, they give rise to other and still more terrible diseases which are transmitted from generation to generation.”

Gandhi was also the one – on refusing to meet with Margaret Sanger during her first trip to India – who stated quite emphatically:

“Self-control is the only method of regulating births. Contraceptives are an insult to womanhood. The only difference between a prostitute and a woman using contraceptives, is that the former sells her body to several men, the latter sells it to one man.” (*Harijan* 5/5/46)

I’ve been a bishop less than four years. Two years ago, I felt prompted by the Lord to write my first pastoral letter. Since it happened to be the 35th anniversary of *Humanae Vitae*, Pope Paul’s encyclical dealing with contraception, I wanted to make that the theme of my letter.

But I hesitated, since *Humanae Vitae* was roundly ridiculed and rejected by both Catholics and non-Catholics, and it continues to be ridiculed and rejected to this very day.

Take for example what a syndicated columnist, Diane Glass, expressed just two months ago in the *Florida-Times Union*. I quote from her column:

“The Roman Empire has fallen, the Inquisition has failed and the Dark Ages are over. And lo and behold – women use birth control...It’s time for the Catholic Church to wake up and smell the 21st century...It is discriminatory to prohibit women from being priests and to disallow birth control based on old-world ideas...Is Mary put on a pedestal so we can look under her skirt? That would explain our culture’s obsession with Catholic schoolgirl uniforms, but not the refusal of the Catholic Church to recognize female priests nor its blind eye to the necessity of birth control.”

Realizing that writing a pastoral letter on contraception would open me to ridicule too, I began the project somewhat reluctantly. Halfway through, I almost scrapped it. But after bringing the matter to the Lord in prayer, I recalled that Jesus, too, had been rejected for bearing witness to the truth. So I resumed my writing, but this time with enthusiasm.

Surprisingly, I received only two negative letters that criticized my pastoral. Well over 50 correspondents thanked me for it. I would like to read an excerpt from one such letter.

“Dear Bishop Galeone,

“My wife Jeannie and I just read your pastoral letter in the July/August edition of the *St. Augustine Catholic*. I don’t know why we missed this issue last summer. (He wrote me this letter in October.) However, a coworker of mine gave me a copy and asked me to read your article. When my wife and I read it, we were deeply touched.

“Jeannie and I have been married for 13 years and we have four children (ages 5 to 12). Our oldest are twins and, having gotten a late start, they were born when we were in our mid-30s. They were followed by our third child two years later (three in diapers at once). Like many others, we fell into the worldview of not trusting God and saying to ourselves that we couldn’t possibly handle another baby for a while and that NFP wasn’t very reliable. So, for a period of months we used contraception. During that time we both felt that there was more than a fertility barrier between us, and our marriage suffered. By the grace of God, I heard solid teaching on contraception at a St. Joseph’s Covenant Keepers conference held by Steve Wood. We both went to confession and became open to life again. God has since given us our youngest son, who has been a delight to our whole family. We cannot imagine life without him...

“One other thing I want to mention. My coworker (the one who brought your pastoral to my attention) is a young man whose marriage is in trouble. His wife is Catholic, though he himself has never even been baptized. In his despair over his wife’s distancing herself from him, he turned to the Lord and started going to Mass on his own. That’s how he came across your pastoral letter. Last month he made the decision to become a Catholic due, in large part, to your pastoral. It opened his eyes. He attributes the root of his difficulties to their desire not to have children and to essentially live as two cohabiting single people...My friend asked me to sponsor him, which I consider a great honor...”

I would like to conclude my talk with a short passage from the book entitled, *In Defense of Purity*. Its author, Johann Christoph Arnold, belongs to the Bruderhoff Community in Pennsylvania. In these few lines, he expresses in words that seem all but inspired the twofold purpose that God planted in the sexual union – to give life and love.

I quote: “As the union of husband and wife under God, sex fulfills its divinely ordained function in a profound way: it is tender, peaceful, and mysterious. Far from being an animal-like act of aggression and lust, it creates and expresses a unique bond of deep, self-giving love.

“When a couple experiences the sexual sphere in this way, they will feel that their union cannot be meant only for procreation. At the same time, they must remember that through their uniting, a new soul may be called out of eternity to earth. If they are truly reverent, they will feel such awe for the holiness of this act that their union will become like a prayer to God.”

My brothers and sisters, it is my ardent desire that all the couples you minister to – indeed, that all married couples throughout the world – may soon come to experience their marital union – like a beautiful prayer to God.