

## **The NFP Choice: Loving Life vs. Living a Lie**

*A CCL Workshop at the Couple to Couple League Convention – Chicago*

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By Bishop Victor Galeone

Before becoming bishop, one of the most enjoyable experiences I had as pastor was preparing couples for marriage. After filling out the prenuptial forms, we'd spend some time casually discussing their post-wedding plans. Then and only then, would I surface the topic that I was so anxious to bring to their attention: Natural Family Planning. My goal was to challenge this couple sitting in front of me to sign up for a full set of NFP classes. And this is how I'd go about it.

I'd begin rather innocently, by asking: "May I pose an example for your comments? Let's say that a husband is excitedly telling his wife about an incident that had taken place at work earlier that day. While listening, his wife opens a drawer, takes out two wads of cotton and — without saying a word — jams them in her ears. By that action, what is she communicating to her husband? — "Gee, Father Vic, she's telling him to get lost. She's bored." — "Precisely, but in a manner that's abnormal. The normal person that wants silence, simply asks for it: 'Honey, I've got a splitting headache. Could we continue this conversation later?'"

"Now then, the same scenario, except this time, the wife is all ears, hanging onto her husband's every word. Without warning, her husband, while continuing to speak, muffles his mouth with both hands. Puzzled, his wife asks, 'What's wrong, darling? Are you feeling nauseous?' — No, he feels perfectly fine. He just does not want his wife to understand what he's saying. Again, what do you make of this behavior?" — "Father Vic, that's even more bizarre. It couldn't happen unless the man had flipped." — "You're right! It's abnormal behavior. Again, the normal person who wants silence, asks for it: 'Honey, I have a terrible rasp in my throat. Could we talk about this later on?'"

I'd then continue with the couple: "Isn't that strange? When it comes to verbal communication, we consider blocking one's ears or muffling one's mouth abnormal behavior — and rightly so. Yet in sexual communication we've come to accept the lie that that sort of behavior is the most natural thing in the world. For what else is a diaphragm or the Pill or a condom but the deliberate attempt to block the finality of the sexual union?"

"And if you question the appropriateness of my analogy, when you arrive home this evening, check out the first meaning of the word intercourse in your dictionary. It means an exchange of ideas. And in the Bible, the verb to know is used as a euphemism for sexual relations. And to this day, to conceive refers to both verbal as well as sexual conception."

Worse still — to quote from the pastoral letter I wrote last year (*Marriage: A Communion of Life and Love*) — how can one justify a husband having a surgeon clip his robust vocal cords, or a wife having her healthy eardrums surgically removed? Yet in the area of sexual communication, how do such horrific examples differ from a vasectomy or a tubal ligation? Isn't it the task of a surgeon to remove an organ only when it is diseased and threatens human life? If the testes or

ovaries are not diseased, on what grounds are we frustrating their purpose? Could it be that we have been so indoctrinated by the culture of death that we now consider babies a disease, from which we must immunize ourselves through sterilization?

From what has been said thus far, we can readily see how most couples in First World countries today have lost sight of the fact that Contraception is telling lies with our bodies. It contradicts the natural order that God established for our human nature. Before discussing this point in detail, I would like to digress for a moment to a study that was done in 1972 at the medical school of Rutgers University. The researchers established a colony of stump tail macaque monkeys to learn the possible link between chemicals and behavior. (What follows is drawn mostly from *The Decline of Males* by Lionel Tiger, pp. 37-39)

The monkeys lived on a small island off of Bermuda, compatible to their native habitat in West Africa. The monkeys are normally organized around a male leader with a group of adult females. The males usually monopolize sexual access to the fertile females. In this case study the male leader was named Austin, accompanied by a group of nine grown females. After three months Austin had established affectionate links with three favorite females with whom he had regular sexual relations.

Once the pattern was set, the experiment began. Five of the females were injected with Depo-Provera. And in this trial group there were two of Austin's favorite companions. Even though he continued to groom them as before, not once did his relationship with them result in sexual intercourse. For this, Austin chose two other adult females as his partners.

After three months, the drug was no longer effective. So the researchers medicated the four remaining female monkeys, which included one former favorite of Austin's and the two newer ones. Yes, he continued to approach them and court them, but now he stopped short of sexual intercourse. Instead, he resumed his sexual link with his two original favorites (who were now off the medication) to which he added a third.

After the second three-month dose had lapsed, all nine of the adult females were medicated. Austin now began to behave in a turbulent and confused manner. He approached the females, stroked them, but never once had intercourse with any of them!

After another three months, the medication was again ineffective, rendering the entire group drug-free. It was back to nature and back to true love. Faithful Austin returned to his original three companions.

Lionel Tiger, the author of the book from which I cite this example, is not a Christian. He's an evolutionist, who happens to be a non-believer. Yet even he has the intelligence to conclude: "Sexuality is about relationships. "To which I add, if that is true in the more developed species of the animal kingdom, how much more so when we come to the peak of all material creation: Man!

Yes, sexuality is about relationships. To examine the profound truth underlying that statement let us go back to the dawn of creation, back to the first chapter of Genesis. God has just about

completed the whole of his material creation. As he advances from one stage to the next, he simply gives a command and it becomes reality: "Let there be light...Let there be an expanse between the waters...Let the land produce living creatures..." But as he approaches the end of the sixth day, for the first time God pauses and deliberates before proceeding: "Let us make man in our own image and likeness..."

And then the sacred author concludes: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them."

I'd like to elaborate this concept, which I briefly touched on in my pastoral letter. Since we have been created in God's own image, we are to reflect God's life in this world — we are to act in the same manner as he acts.

Jesus came to reveal God's inner life to us: "No one has ever seen God. The one and only Son, who is always at the Father's side, came to reveal him." (Jn 1:18) Jesus pulled back the veil concealing the God's inner life. He faced the same obstacles that you or I might face if we tried to tell a person born blind what a sunset is like..... Now then, let's take a moment to examine God's inner life. (This is a mini-course in Trinity 101.)

God is Pure Spirit. From all eternity, this Pure Spirit realizes who he is. Through this self-knowledge, God communicates himself to the eternal Concept that he conceives — the Word, as John names him in the Prologue of his Gospel. In conceiving this Word, God did not give just a part of himself, like the sperm of a human father, or the ovum of a human mother. No, he gives his entire self to the Word that he conceives. So from all eternity, we have two separate Persons in one and the same divine being: the Conceiver/the Concept — the Thinker/the Thought — the Speaker/the Eternal Word — the Father/the Son.

Furthermore, from all eternity, the Father always loves the Son, and the Son always loves the Father. There has never been an instant that they do not love each other. This mutual love between the Father and the Son is the third Person — the Holy Spirit. As we pray in the Creed, "We believe in the Holy Spirit...who proceeds from the Father and the Son..."

Now then, we human beings have been called to imitate the inner love of the Trinity. God created us in his own image and likeness — male and female he created us, so that through the love embrace between husband and wife, we can do what not even the angels on high can do. We can procreate — that is, we become partners with God in creation! Unless husband and wife come together in mutual love as a total offering of self to each other, God will not create the immortal soul that forms part of the unique person destined to live in his love forever. How awesome! This is what our Holy Father John Paul is challenging us to live up to with his teaching on the theology of the body.

A few years ago, José Buliff, a physician in Indiana, expressed this same theme in words that seem all but inspired: "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."

Dr. Buliff continues: “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)

In Vatican II, the Council Fathers expressed the same concept: “When the Lord Jesus prayed to the Father, ‘that all may be one as we are one,’ ...he implied a certain similarity between the union of the divine Persons and the union of God's children joined in truth and love. This similarity reveals that man...cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself.” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 24)

In 1968, this was the same message that Pope Paul VI communicated to the world in his landmark encyclical, *Humanae Vitae*. But the world turned a deaf ear to the truth. A firestorm of dissent erupted over the Holy Father's challenge that husbands and wives should express the truth in love — by keeping the marital embrace open to life.

I recall one especially distasteful editorial cartoon, which depicted a large frowning face of Paul VI superimposed on a shot of a teeming crowd of thousands upon thousands of the poor in Calcutta. The caption read: “Pope bans the Pill while millions starve in India!”

It would have been more objective to have placed the face of Pope Paul with that of Mahatma Gandhi, the father of modern India. I would like to quote a few of Gandhi's comments related to contraception:

- Self-control is the surest and the only method of regulating the birth rate. Birth control by contraceptives is race suicide. (*Young India* 9/16/26)
- It is futile to hope that the use of contraceptives will be restricted to the mere regulation of progeny. There is hope for a decent life only so long as the sexual act is definitely related to the conception of precious life. To separate the sexual act from its natural consequence will lead to hideous promiscuity and...the endorsement of unnatural vice. (*Harijan* 10/3/36)
- 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)

Surprisingly, even some feminists support Gandhi's insights. I quote what one of them commented — though somewhat crudely — in “The Doctor's Case against the Pill”(1969): “An editor at a newsmagazine, who is now thirty-five and ‘happy’ but feels she ‘barely survived’ ...explained: ‘I felt like an ever-ready sex battery. I had no excuse for saying no; no time to think. Month after month I got to loathe myself more. I think that the Pill and the other instant contraceptives like the IUD are the worst things that ever happened to the female sex. Take away that tiny chance of pregnancy, that question of commitment or consideration, and what have you got? Just one of those blown-up dolls which sailors use to masturbate.’”

I would now like to illustrate all of this theoretical talk with the concrete example of three sterling couples, whom I personally know. A common denominator linking these couples is that

after first experiencing the lie of contraception, they came to discover the liberating truth of the Church's teaching.

The first couple is Matthew and Rachel Watkins. Ten years ago their photo appeared on the cover of the January issue of CCL Newsletter. The reason? The headline gave the answer: "CCL Certifies its 1000th Teaching Couple." The story recounted their odyssey, beginning with their first child conceived while Rachel was on the Pill. Rachel explains: "This pregnancy ended in a miscarriage at eight weeks. Within two weeks I was pregnant again — and Margaret Anne was born on November 20, 1987."

After experiencing neurological problems, Rachel decided to use a diaphragm, which also led to an unplanned pregnancy. "I found out I was pregnant the same day I had a spinal tap that confirmed suspicions of multiple sclerosis. Of course, my doctors recommended 'protection' from further pregnancies following this birth."

Disillusioned with the advice they that were being given, they decided to use condoms as a stopgap measure until they could decide what to do. In the meantime, they found themselves pregnant again.

During this pregnancy, Matthew and Rachel received a great deal of pressure to do something about their family planning. At the same time, Father Victor Galeone in Baltimore was working with Matthew, showing him the scriptural, physical and emotional truths found in NFP. Rachel, however, was still not open to the idea.

"I wasn't ready yet. I was still reeling from my MS diagnosis and the failure of medical science," she explained. Following the birth of Matthew Jacob, Rachel and Matthew began CCL classes.

"The Lord began working on me," Rachel says. "Over the four months of instruction, as I prayed and charted, the Lord broke my hard heart. I began to see that while science had failed and lied to us, the Lord never would... We have come to embrace not only the method of NFP but the entire ministry of CCL."

Last December I received a Christmas card from the Watkins with a photo enclosed. It showed Matthew and Rachel in front of the altar of their parish church for the baptism of their youngest arrival, baby Nora, surrounded by their other eight children — all sporting infectious smiles.

The second couple of our threesome I met while I was serving as the director of the Propagation of the Faith in the Archdiocese of Baltimore. In the summer of 2000, I organized a trip of volunteers for a working mission to our sister diocese in Haiti. On the day we departed from the airport, I met Pamela, the wife of one of the volunteers, who was holding their firstborn child, Amber. Larry, the proud father, was dotting on his six-month old daughter, musing aloud how he was going to miss her during his two-week absence.

In Haiti, after supper one night, the volunteers served Larry a cupcake with a lighted candle on top. Then with a lot of gusto everyone broke into a chorus of "Happy Anniversary to You!" It was his fifth wedding anniversary. Later that night, Larry called home to join his wife in spirit.

On the return flight to Baltimore, Larry happened to be sitting next to me. After some small talk, I remarked: “Larry, I’m deeply impressed that you joined us for this trip, knowing that you couldn’t celebrate your fifth anniversary with Pamela. That was quite a sacrifice.”

“Well, Father, I figured if I didn’t go to Haiti this year — especially after my name was one of the finalists picked at random — I might never be able to. And Pamela understood.”

“Larry, to show my appreciation, I’d like to give you a small gift, if you’ll accept it.” — “Of course, Father. What is it?” — “A subscription to one of my favorite journals. I want it to come as a surprise. It should be arriving in six to eight weeks.”

That subscription was to CCL Family Foundations. Christmas of 2002, I received a card from Larry and Pam, informing me that they were expecting their second child in March. On April 8th 2003, Larry wrote me the following letter:

“Dear Bishop Galeone, Our new arrival was born at St. Agnes Hospital at 10:15 on Holy Thursday. She is truly a blessing. God has already enriched our lives through her. Anna and Pamela are doing well. Amber is also adjusting to her new sister. Children are truly blessings from God.

“I was wondering if you would remember a special intention in your prayers. Early in our marriage, Pamela and I were not open to life. We used artificial contraception like everybody else. Today’s culture was telling us that this was the normal thing to do. We had no one tell us why we should not contracept. We knew the ‘official’ Church teaching was against it, but we were not taught why. We even had priests tell us it was a personal decision. So if we felt the need to use contraception, it was okay. I am not trying to blame somebody else for our sins. Pamela and I were both responsible for our decisions. However, I feel that if we were told the truth without compromise, we might have two or three more children now. This leads me to my point. Couples need to be taught the truth about contraception. We were never taught that the Pill is an abortifacient and can possibly abort our children without knowing it. We were not taught that artificial birth control is a hindrance to building a healthy marriage. We did not know that there is a healthier, Church-approved alternative to artificial birth control.”

In concluding Larry’s testimony, I want to emphasize that I never asked any probing questions on that return flight from Haiti. I never quizzed Larry as to why their first child had not arrived until the fifth year of their marriage. I never inquired if he had heard the good news about Natural Family Planning. All I did was plant a seed with a simple gift subscription to the CCL Newsletter. And God’s grace did the rest.

Strange, how so many of us are afraid to speak the truth in love. I know. Last year, while I was preparing the draft of my first pastoral letter for the 35th anniversary of *Humanae Vitae*, I began to have serious doubts about the project. I was becoming increasingly frustrated. There wasn’t enough time to devote to it. My priests would mock me: “Bishop, you’re embarrassing us!” Would I be upsetting our laity? One night, just as I was about to chuck the whole effort, I went before the Lord in my private chapel and prayed. “Jesus, if it’s your will, give me the grace and the courage to finish this pastoral. I’m so afraid of how people might react.” Almost,

imperceptibly, St. Paul's words to the Galatians came to mind: "If I were still trying to please mortal man, I would not be a servant of Christ." (Gal. 1:10)

My pastoral, *Marriage: A Communion of Life and Love*, appeared in our diocesan publication the *St. Augustine Catholic*, last July. And that brings me to the third and final couple I want to discuss this afternoon. Last October 24h, I received the following letter from the husband:

"Dear Bishop Galeone,

My wife Mary and I just read your pastoral letter about contraception in the July edition of the *St. Augustine Catholic*. I don't know why we missed that edition because we usually read every issue. However, a co-worker gave me a copy and asked me to read the article. When we read it, we were deeply touched.

"Mary and I have been married for 13 years and we have four boys (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 son 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. God has since given us our youngest son who has been a delight to our whole family. We cannot imagine life without him.

"We home school our children and while Mary was attending a Catholic homeschoolers' conference, she felt that the Lord wanted us to trust Him even more and be more open to life. Since that time we have not even used NFP and, being now in our mid-40s, that was a big step due to all the hype about Downs Syndrome, and other troubles with late-in-life pregnancies. I don't know if the Lord wants to give us another child, but we will joyfully accept whatever He has to give...If we had had clear teaching on the matter, as you have presented in your pastoral letter, we might have avoided the struggles we went through.

"One other thing I want to mention. My co-worker is a young man whose marriage is in trouble. His wife is Catholic, though he has never even been baptized. In his despair over his wife's distancing herself from him, he turned to the Lord and started coming to Mass on his own. He made the decision to begin RCIA last month due, in large part, to your article. It opened his eyes and he attributes the root of his difficulties to their desire not to have children and to essentially live as two cohabiting single people. (This lifestyle drove his wife into a relationship with another man.) My friend asked me to sponsor him, which I consider a great honor. He is pursuing a relationship with the Lord, not to win his wife back, but for himself. It seems to be a genuine deep conversion."

This heroic co-worker I met last February on the Sunday the Rite of Election held at the Cathedral. Who could ever have imagined that the Lord would use my pastoral letter to draw this non-believing, non-baptized soul to the faith?

My good friends, we stand at the crossroads. One path branches off to the left. It's strewn with the briars and thistles of pornography, fornication, infidelity, divorce, contraception, abortion, homosexual activity, and same-sex unions — all planted by “the father of lies, who comes only to steal, to kill and to destroy.”

The other path branches off to the right. It's fragrant with the aroma from the blossoms of self-control, chastity, fidelity, lifelong marriages blessed with the gift of happy, joyful children — all planted by the author of Truth and Life, “who came that we might have life and have it to the full.” (*Jn. 10:10*)