

November 2004

The Meaning of the Marital Act

David M. Duff

Follow this and additional works at: <http://epublications.marquette.edu/lnq>

Recommended Citation

Duff, David M. (2004) "The Meaning of the Marital Act," *The Linacre Quarterly*: Vol. 71: No. 4, Article 4.
Available at: <http://epublications.marquette.edu/lnq/vol71/iss4/4>

The Meaning of the Marital Act

by

David M. Duff, B.A (ED); B.A., M.R.E.

The author holds a Master's degree in Religious Education with a minor in Moral Theology from the University of St. Michael's College, Toronto, Canada. Mr. Duff retired from the teaching profession after some 30 years. He currently resides in St. John's, Newfoundland, Canada.

Introduction

The purpose of this essay is to explore in its complete richness the meaning of human sexual intercourse, known as the marital act. That act will be explored in its complete objectivity as that reality promotes human growth, love and spirituality. It will be the further purpose of this essay to demonstrate that the objective reality of human sexual intercourse called the marital act will not tolerate the presence of contraception with its expressed intention to sever the unitive from the procreative. Further, should contraception be introduced, that couple's decision will have destructive and invalidating consequences upon the very essence of the marital act. Contraception is evil and it seeks to degrade and manipulate the marital act.

The more clearly we define the objective significance and meaning of human sexual intercourse inside marriage, the marital act, the less authenticity we can legitimately claim for it outside marriage. The significance and meaning of human sexual intercourse must promote a total vision of man, made in the image and likeness of God, and that vision must be a redemptive one.

God's Collaboration

Human procreation requires on the part of the spouses responsible collaboration with the fruitful love of God; the gift of human life must be actualized in marriage through the specific acts of husband and wife in accordance with the laws inscribed in their persons and their union.¹

Of all God's creatures we have been singled out by Him and given exclusively the rare and precious gift of procreation: choosing to love new life into existence for God. Life must be the fruit of spouses self-giving – as is love.

Human love and life also requires cooperation and collaboration with God. This collaboration constitutes responsible parenthood. This gift of creating love and creating life must be conceived out of the human acts of husband and wife. This marital sexual act is written by God into the essences of their very persons and, therefore, their union; their communion is the fulfillment of God's purpose for them. Marriage protects the sacredness of these human acts of love and life—*creative actions of God*—which, in turn, promote the true dignity of the human person within the total vision of man designed by our Creator redeemed by our Savior, Jesus Christ.

Gift and Blessing

Human procreation requires on the part of the spouses responsible collaboration with the fruitful love of God; the gift of human life must be actualized in marriage through the specific acts of husband and wife in accordance with the laws inscribed in their persons and their union.²

Human life is a gift and a blessing. Life must be the fruit of spouses self-giving as is love. Marriage is the protection God has written around the marital sexual act for it signifies the faithfulness, the exclusivity and commitment as necessary components to couple love. Marriage and love are ordered by the way God created them to the raising and educating of children. Children are the supreme gift of marriage and an important source of help to parents. God is the co-creator who chooses the couple to gift with new life—not the reverse. Human love, by God's design, demands completion in more love and more lives. Marital unity is based on the privilege to become father and mother through each other—through the bodily gifts exchanged at sexual intercourse. This privilege must be respected. The child has the right to be conceived in the womb through sexual acts of a man and woman. The natural laws which make these demands are written by God into the very natures of man and woman as He conceived them. This family is, first and foremost, a communion of persons. This family underlies the basic structural unit upon which society is based. For the good of society responsible parenthood must be based in this family.

Qualities of Marital Love

This love is fully human, of the senses and of the spirit at the same

time...an act of free will, intended to endure and grow by means of the joys and sorrows of daily life; this love is total...a very special form of friendship in which husband and wife share everything without reservation; this love is faithful and exclusive until death; the love is fecund for it is not exhausted in the communion between husband and wife but is destined to continue raising up new lives. Marriage and conjugal love are by their very nature ordained toward the begetting and education of children. Children are really the supreme gift of marriage and contribute to the welfare of their parents.³

The love that is the human sexual marital act has many important and defining qualities. It is fully human. As we are made in the image and likeness of God, our acts to be fully human must be chosen and loving. This love is truly human in that it is chosen—not forced. It is also genuinely loving in that it is a freely-giving love. As love gives all, expecting nothing in return, it is a love marked by a total and free surrender of mind, body and spirit—the total person.

This love is a body-spirit love of a full person for a full person. Nothing of the person is held in reserve. This love is a free-giving surrender of the entire person. For if anything of the person is held in reserve, it could not be total giving. It is given freely without reservation with a full surrender of all aspects of the person, including fertility. This love grows through the joys and sorrows of daily life. This love is one of personal friendship where trust and complete sharing are necessary. This love is defined by fidelity, commitment and exclusiveness. It is a sacrament according to the Son of God who created it and participates in it by His will and design—for its creative love is completed in the procreation of children. This love is fertile in creating more love and in creating new life according to God's plan and timetable.

In keeping with the true meaning of marital sexual intercourse, should God choose to gift such a couple with children, they will, in faith, regard this as a sure positive sign that they are indeed ready. For such a blessing would mean that God has called them to the exalted vocation of parenthood. It is not for couples to worry or to plan for children. This vocation must be left to the providence of God's wisdom who sees more and knows more. The decision to marry and engage in marital acts represents the couple's commitment to both themselves and parenthood; the readiness is in God's hands.

This love is fertile in life-creating because this love is not exhausted by the love between the couple. Far from being completed, this love cries out, even demands, for its completion, the openness of the couple to new human life in each and every single sexual act. This love is destined to enrich the lives of husband and wife and to live beyond them in the raising up of new lives. Marriage and love are ordered by the way God created

them to the raising and the education of children. Children are the supreme gift of this love and marriage, and, are an important source of help to parents. Children are gifts from God. Each child is another opportunity God presents us for love. Each child is another chance for redemption from God. God as co-creator chooses the couple to gift with new life. Every child conceived, regardless of the poverty of its circumstances, is a miracle of God's intervening love into His world.

The Nuptial Meanings

Marital love is a type of human friendship love that is unique because it is sacramental, exclusive by virtue of requiring a fidelity and a totality unique in kind to human friendships, fruitful or pro-creative, and fittingly, properly, and uniquely expressed in marital acts or the "acts proper to marriage."⁴

When the couple initiate the love-making process of marital sexual intercourse through a freely chosen act, they have also simultaneously freely chosen to both create more love and to create the possibility of more new human life should God so gift them. They can no more stop this new life than they can stop the new love from being created. Such is designed by God into the very nature of these acts. Simply put, if a married couple chooses the sex act, they have chosen its consequences—the possibility of a new life. This sexual embrace, to be authentic, admits of no limitations. Such is the way God designed His gift to us.

Love is a sharing of minds, bodies and souls. Each person surrenders freely and joyfully to the other, the beloved. This surrender is not marked by reluctance but by excited anticipation. This love is fertile: it demands to be expressed in the creation of more couple love; but even then, this God-given power is not satisfied, for this love will await God's creative spark to be expressed in a child should God so bless this couple.

Couples would do well to stand in awe of the Creator's power which He has shared with us in the form of a helpless baby. "You can easily judge the character of a man by how well he treats those who can do nothing for him or to him." (The American Flint) We are asked to give totally and fully, and, we will be judged accordingly because love is not mean nor miserly. Love is generous to a fault. This love further declares and demands that should God so gift us, we will regard that invitation of God's supreme will as a definite sign that we are indeed ready to care for this expression of our love for each other and God's love for us.

This love is fertile in life-creating because the love is not exhausted between the couple. This love reaches out for and demands completion in the openness of the couple to new human life in every act. This is the way

God designed marital love so that it would reach out in anticipation of His creative spark. This love is destined to enrich the lives of the couple and to look beyond them for its completion in the raising up of new lives. This love demands it be allowed to love other lives into existence because herein lies its true destiny. This is uniquely stated in the expression "making love makes babies". Guided by God the love generated by the couple literally takes on a life of its own and seeks to achieve its God-given purpose: new life.

Marriage and love are ordered by the way God created them to the raising and educating of children. Children are the supreme gift of marriage and are an important source of help to parents. God is the co-creator who chooses the couple to gift with new life—not the reverse. Human life, by God's design, demands completion in more love and more lives.

Full Humanity

In this writer's view, the critical principle of sexual theology in our day is the promotion of the full humanity of human sexual intercourse as intended by God, our Creator, when society guided by excesses of secular humanism which include relativism, subjectivism and individualism, seeks to promote a more impoverished vision of sex as recreation. Therefore, it is imperative that the full and objective meaning of the marital act be clarified. H. Vernon Sattler comments on this nuptial meaning when he says: "Sexual intercourse is the one human activity which has the deepest of inherent meanings...it is possible to engage in this activity with outside intentions but that is not what the activity means itself."⁵

Sattler proposes that sexual intercourse has its own objective meaning which is completely separate from and independent of the subjective intentions of the couple. This sexual intercourse is human. It has an objective significance that is part of their situation and not dependent on their awareness of it.

Again, as Kippley argues, "Sexual intercourse is intended by God to be at least implicitly a renewal of the marriage covenant."⁶ While the married couple do not have to be thinking explicitly of renewing their covenant, the objective meaning is protected as long as they do not act against this meaning.

Married Love: A Communion of Persons

Pope John Paul II talks about the objective meaning of the marital act in terms of the communion of persons and the nuptial meaning of the body. For the Pope, our bodies express our persons whether or not we turn our minds specifically to this nuptial meaning.

The physical gift of a man and a woman to each other is the outward

sign, the sacrament, of the familial *communion of persons*. Our bodies are to express our persons. The body, then, is the means and the sign of the gift of the male-person to the female-person. The Holy Father calls this capacity of the body to express the total self-surrender of one person to another the nuptial meaning of the body. In this total physical surrender based on the *communion of persons*, the married couple becomes, physically, an image of God.⁷

The marital act is that human sexual intercourse by a married couple who have permanently promised exclusiveness and faithfulness.

Married Love Glorifies God

Human spousal love glorifies God because God wants us to see the unique preciousness of each person he has loved into being, as we do in ecstatic self-giving which when creative of a child manifests a remote image of the Trinity: Father, mother and child.⁸

Spousal love praises God. By allowing us His precious gift of procreation God wants us to be in awe of the uniqueness and preciousness of life in all its vulnerability. We will be moved to praise and glorify His majesty as we glimpse His omnipotence.

Married Love: Sharing A Power

Cormac Burke speaks of the sharing of an awesome God-given power in each and every act:

Therefore, what makes marital intercourse of a unique relationship and union is the sharing of a power; an extra-ordinary, life-related, creative, physical, sexual power. Each spouse says to the other "with you alone I am prepared to share this God-given life-oriented power". In true marital intercourse something real has been exchanged; and, there remains, as witness to their conjugal union the husband's seed in the wife's body. By every single act of intercourse, each spouse is confirmed in the unique status of being husband and wife to the other.⁹

In true sexual intercourse that is marital and that is human, something real is exchanged. The husband's seed in the wife's body is a physical human manifestation of a total sharing of a sexual power. The presence of the seed is an extraordinary witness to their conjugal relationship. This relationship is confirmed in every single act and re-confirms their status as husband and wife.

Married Love: A Communion of Persons

Karol Wojtyla, Roman Catholic moral theologian, writing on sexuality, marriage and the family, had the following to say on the marital act:

The physical gift of a man and a woman to each other is the outward sign, the sacrament, of the familial *communion of persons* when the married couple acts out their vows and God's will. The body, then, is the means and the sign of the gifts of the male person and the female person. This is the nuptial meaning of the body.¹⁰

Our Holy Father explains the love relationships between the persons of the Trinity as a communion of persons. He believes married love is also capable of this same communion of persons. Human sexual intercourse is the sacrament of the communion of persons only when the couple are acting out their marriage vows according to God's will. This is the nuptial meaning of the body whereby the body becomes both the means and the sign of the gifts of both male and female persons.

H. Vernon Sattler comments on this nuptial meaning of the body: "Sexual intercourse is the one human activity which has the deepest of inherent meanings...it is possible to engage in this activity with outside intentions but that is not what the activity means in itself."¹¹

Here again, Sattler separates the inherent objective meaning of the marital act from the couple understanding. It is not necessary that the couple know the full implications of their loving act in all its theology; it is only necessary that they surrender themselves to each other openly and lovingly.

Marital Act as a Sacrament

John Kippley, moral theologian, parent and founder of the Couple to Couple League, compares marital communion to Eucharistic communion:

Both Eucharistic and marital communion are sacramental actions. In the Eucharist we have the full sacrament renewed at each Eucharistic sacrifice...I think it is permissible and not misleading to speak of the marital communion as a sacramental action because it is meant to renew the original covenant.¹²

Kippley wants to further enhance the meaning of the marital communion by even further elevating its significance by comparing the marital act with the Eucharist, the ultimate Christian sacrifice. He sees both as sacramental actions because each renews an original covenant. He sees both as sacred because they are instituted by Jesus Christ. He sees both as sacrifice because the marital act demands the complete surrender of the spouses to each other.

Summary

At this point, we have established that human sexual intercourse is a sacrament of familial communion; that the act can be elevated for a comparison with the Eucharistic communion; that it is a sharing of a sexual power which gives witness to their relationship and re-confirms this in every act.

Unique Relationship

Therefore, what makes marital intercourse a unique relationship and union is...the sharing of a power: an extraordinary, life-related, creative, physical, sexual power. Each spouse says to the other '...with you, alone, I am prepared to share this God-given, life-oriented power.' ...In true marital intercourse, something real is exchanged; and there remains, witness to their conjugal relationship and the intimacy of their conjugal union, the husband's seed in the wife's body. By every single act of true intercourse, each spouse is confirmed the unique status of being husband or wife to the other.¹³

The couple have a unique special relationship where they share an extraordinary sexual power. The presence of the husband's seed in the wife's body is an extraordinary witness to their conjugal relationship. In every single act each spouse is always re-confirmed in their unique status as husband and wife.

Human love and life require co-operation and collaboration with God, the Author of all life. These human acts protect the sacredness of human love and human life as they are the creative actions of God, which, in turn, promote the true dignity of man within His total vision of man as constituting both body and spirit.

Unitive and Procreative

...the church...teaches that each and every act must remain open to the transmission of life. That teaching often set forth by the magisterium is founded upon the inseparable connection, willed by God and unable to be broken by man on his initiative, between the two meanings of the conjugal act: the unitive meaning and the procreative meaning. Indeed by its intimate structure, the conjugal act while most closely uniting husband and wife capacitates them for the generation of new life, according to the laws inscribed in the very being of man and woman. By safe-guarding these essential aspects, the unitive and procreative, the conjugal act preserves in its fullness the sense of true marital love and its ordination towards man's most high calling to parenthood. We believe that the men of our day are

particularly capable of seizing the deeply reasonable and human character of this fundamental principle.¹⁴

This teaching tells us that each and every marital act must remain open to both love and life. The couple collaborate with God and they receive each other and Him with openness. We are to do nothing to interfere with the love/life process once we have freely chosen to set it in motion through freely chosen sexual marital acts. Freedom will be understood as the right to choose under the protection of God's law as revealed through His Son's creation, the Church.

The unitive and procreative aspects are one single entity or act which cannot be separated for any reason whatsoever. It is the insistence on what constitutes that one single entity or act, both unitive and procreative, that protects the integrity or the very essence of the act. That essence reveals that only thus constituted is the act fully and completely human. It is the task of the couple to protect that essence of total and complete humanness by freely choosing to provide the willingness, the openness, the mutual surrender to one another and to God in a triad of love (husband, wife and God) which can, if God so chooses to gift that couple with His creative love spark, love another child into existence to provide yet another chance at redemption for this troubled world.

With each child loved into existence, God is saying "I still hope you will choose me". God provides the creative spark of new life which profoundly affirms and blesses this marital union and this world in a special way because the couple are co-creators and co-lovers with God. The gifts of love and life are released and generated according to laws inscribed in man and woman only where there is complete and total sharing of love by participants—God and the couple—in a co-operation, participation and collaboration of co-creators and co-lovers.

God has so lovingly designed man so that the gifts from God to man of love and life will only be made manifest if there exists a true human sexual marital act by which there is total, complete and absolute sharing of all gifts of this mutual union. Only in true human sexual intercourse will God's gifts find the objective reality in which they can be generated and shared. Should fertility be withheld the sharing is not human. Should one partner force themselves on the other, the sharing is not complete nor total and therefore, not human. The humanness of the act will insist upon a total sharing of lover and life as gifts on a mutual basis. This is God's plan, God's design.

Both Love and Life

Some would suggest favoring love over life as a fundamental necessity due to social and personal reasons yet would be mortified at the

idea of contemplating favoring the procreative at the expense of the love component. Such would be regarded as utterly unrealistic and unprogressive in our time. These have been persuaded by the errors of a secular construct. While seeing the suppression of freedom in the latter they would be blinded to its similar suppression in the former.

True sexual freedom and the dignity of man is only pursued and enhanced by protecting both the love and life meanings as the only possibility that provides for the total enriching of the human person and the total flourishing of the human spirit. It is an integral part of God's plan that love and life aspects be pursued equally and in a balance that so insures neither one will be preferred over the other for such is the delicate design God has built into His gift, but is so very easily pursued by human choice and respect for the integrity of that balance.

The marital act is human when total sharing as co-creators and co-lovers is protected by a love-life entity that is united. Humans are capable of responding to this essential challenge of a fully human marital act as their response to the marriage vocation gifts. Should the love-life aspects be compromised, should the union lack the complete and total couple surrender necessary to release and generate these gifts of love and life, the act by the freely-chosen decision of the couple is rendered humanless, devoid of its essential humanity, sterile of both love and life. In such a case, it is no longer a marital act; its essence is completely changed. It is simply another act of fornication. As Msgr. William Smith explains: "The authentic use of human sexuality requires acts and patterns of acts that respect and foster both those inseparably connected realities of love and life."¹⁵

It is fair to say that God created the human body to respond sexually to the specifically human touch. The human sexual touch is an extremely powerful gift and must be used according to instructions already inscribed in man. This sexual gift is very powerful, like the majestic lion, and demands the protection provided by the virtue of chastity. Marriage is the gift God gives us to properly respect the sexual gift. Chastity is the virtue that regulates the sex drive and forbids ever turning against the gift of fertility through contraception, abortion, etc. Chastity is true sexual freedom.

The marital act is human when total sharing and the co-creators and co-lovers in the total sharing are protected by a love-life entity that is united through a total sharing. Should the love-life aspects be compromised so as to render it lust-seeking, the humanness of the act is also compromised so as to render it inhuman. Humans are capable of responding to this essential challenge of a fully human act as their response to marriage vocation gifts them the resources—freedom, love and God's grace.

The love-creating and life-creating elements of the act cannot be separated for any reason whatsoever. Its humanness depends upon the unitive-procreative foundation so necessary to its totality, its completeness.

Why? Man, of all the animals, has the intellect and the will to choose to love and the freedom to be a co-creator with God. The conjugal act commits the couple to the possibility of creating new life once they choose to engage in it to express their love. This love will demand to reach beyond them with a life of its own and open them to the wishes of the Creator that is love's very source.

As co-creators, a couple can choose to mutually share the sexual expression of love or the expression of sex. Or they can choose chastity and abstain from sex or they can choose chastity and share sex only with each other exclusively. Should they choose to share sex with God as co-creators they also choose to engage a duty, a responsibility that their love imposes, and they joyfully accept not to interfere with the entire process of love their sexual act set in motion: the love-creating life-creating process. The choice: the chastity of sex or the chastity of sexual abstinence; the chastity of sexual intercourse—the physical and spiritual joining of co-creators God and the couple in love; the ejaculation or complete surrender of total gifts in mutual sharing; God's creative spark (should He so choose) in the love act of fertilization or conception of new life. The love cries out for completion in a new life and will not be denied through human selfishness.

To achieve the very essence of what it means to be a man and a woman in the fullest sense of the word is to freely and willingly participate in the love-creating and life-creating process. When the unitive-procreative elements are safeguarded in that single entity only then can the act of mutual love be even called an act of love at all because it has reached the potential of being fully human. It is now an act of mutual love and a marital act. Humans who thus act like humans are fully capable of understanding and appreciating the reasonableness of the essential character of this act and in seeing that this act retains its human character. Conversely, when men reduce themselves to a primitive animal stage and fornicate selfishly by instinct their actions then disappoint their true humanness.

If some see these remarks as limitations on their expression, they would do well to re-examine their expressions to see if they are really talking about love. Their problem could be misinformation about what married sex entails; misinformation gathered from a false dependency on contraception. Their love would then be a secular love—not a Christian love. Secular love will resist this God-given-privilege-obligation-gift perspective. This secular love depends upon the immediate satisfaction of needs, seeks to separate sex completely from love and desires only wanted children who must be perfect. Secular love is akin to fornication.

Consequently, this teaching received the most unwelcome reception of any teaching the Church produced in our time. Secular society's utter contempt was totally expected. They do not understand the Church nor do they want to. The surprise unwelcome came from inside the Church. Why

such impassioned reactions? Today we know that the disobedient within the Church had made unrealistic promises to the people about the acceptance of contraception. Many people expecting such acceptance felt disillusioned, cheated and very angry with the Church.

Natural Family Planning

God was mindful in creating the sexual gift that married couples desire to use that gift responsibly. He therefore created rhythms of fertility and infertility to aid in responsible parenthood, more commonly called natural family planning. Couples learn to work with God and His plan for their lives. They learn to trust God that He will not gift them beyond their resources.

Natural family planning informs with the knowledge of fertility and infertility so that the couple can act responsibly. As co-creators with God, as co-participants with God, the couple know they must adhere to their part of the agreement: the couple express willingness to give themselves fully and totally to each other without any reservations and God brings the spark of new life and love to this communion of persons. It has been the freely chosen act on the couple's part to initiate this co-creative activity with God. Therefore, their willingness also extends to openly receive this spark of love and life from the Creator. Children are really the true gift of marriage, a fact that many infertile couples can readily appreciate. NFP marriages come with these built-in attitudes.

The foregoing outlines the Christian Roman Catholic view of our sexual capacity as gift protected by marriage. This view does not invite contraception but rather views this as being totally inappropriate for its purposes. Further, I believe the unwelcome use of contraception changes the very essence of the marital act. The act of contraception becomes one deprived of love and is rendered sterile and selfish.

A basic syllogism is offered. The major premise has already been developed above. In the succeeding four examples, the minor premise will be entertained leading to the conclusion.

1. The marital act promotes the full humanity of human sexual intercourse as intended by the Creator.
2. But contraception destroys the marital act in its objective meaning by frustrating the love aspect and the life aspect in the pursuit of its completion of openness to God's creative life power initiative.
3. Therefore, contraception is wrong because it denies the openness to love and life that God created within the marital act.

Wojtyla writes that couples who practice contraception manipulate and degrade human sexuality—and with it themselves and their marriage partner—by altering its value of total self-giving. Thus, the innate language that expresses the total reciprocal self-giving of husband and wife is overlaid, through contraception, by an objectively contradictory language, namely, that of not giving oneself totally to the other. For the contracepting couple, the sexual act is a lie because the spouses refuse to give themselves to one another as potential mothers and fathers.¹⁶

Our Holy Father wrote that contraception manipulates and degrades not only human sexuality, but also ourselves and our marriage partner by completely changing the total self-giving of the sexual act to only a reserved partial giving and by deliberately dis-inviting God as co-partner. Thus, the inherent body language of the sexual act of total mutual self-surrender of husband and wife is frustrated because the contradictory language of not giving oneself totally is overlaid on top of it.

Their sexual loving act is changed from a truth to a lie. This lie is an insult to the dignity of their persons as well as to the communion of persons represented by a truthful act now robbed of its truthfulness. It is also an insult to the Creator. They have insulted the nuptial meaning of the body in their selfishness. The true evil of contraception lies in its ability to transform such a sacred, loving act into a lie. This is the evil of contraception because the spouses refuse to give themselves to each other as potential fathers and mothers. They are content to give themselves only as lovers. They are not willing to place their trust in God—the giver of the gift.

On Contraception

Couples who use contraception have tremendous problems with God's plan for responsible parenthood with Him as co-creator, Who chooses to gift a couple with new life as their human love searches out in demand for completion in more love and more lives. The couple are largely unaware of such concepts having never been exposed to them. Secular moral thought has produced contraception with its back-up abortion and markets these along with euthanasia as completely necessary and responsible. Where contraception fails abortion will be necessary. Couples have been bombarded with this inferior vision. This is not to say that Christian and Roman Catholic couples have bought into this vision but it is to say such couples are so blinded by its immediate results, ease of operation and its empty promises, many have uncritically adopted it—though they do not realize it!

Such couples fail to realize that "contraception, on the objective level, implies the attempt to radically exclude God as the ultimate source of

personal human life in order to put in his place man and woman 'as the ultimate depositories of the source of human life'"¹⁷

The contraceptive marital act is always a failure to love. I have set out four arguments concerning the expectations and demands of marital love. These demonstrate just four ways in which contraception works to make marital love sterile.

Argument #1: Marital Love Makes Demands

Marital intercourse sets forth expectations/demands that once the act is initiated it cannot be interrupted if the integrity of the act is to be maintained. Why?

Marital love, objectively speaking, makes demands which are frustrated in their completion by contraception. The love produced by marital oneness which invited them into the act will demand they reach beyond themselves and open themselves to the wishes of the Creator, the source of that love. The couple must love each other enough to meet these demands. Love demands the couple trust God's judgement; they must deny themselves and bow to God's initiative. They must deny the arrogance of self-sufficiency. Marital love demands they trust God enough to invite as co-participant in the love/life gifts he has given them. God's participation is essential as collaborator and co-creator in this triumvirate of giving. He asks for an acknowledgment of that truth from the couple in the same humility and obedience he requested from the first couple, Adam and Eve.

When, therefore, through contraception married couples remove from the exercise of their conjugal sexuality its potential procreative capacity, they claim a power which belongs solely to God: the power to decide in a final analysis the coming into existence of a human person. They assume the qualification, not of being cooperators in God's creative power, but the ultimate depositories of the source of human life. In this perspective, contraception is judged objectively so profoundly unlawful as never to be, for any reason, justified. To think of, say, the contrary is equal to maintaining that in life situations may arise in which it is lawful not to recognize God as God.¹⁸

Their love and life attitude, signified by their willingness to be participants, collaborators and co-creators with God, is at the root an openness to love totally. Fully and completely as God demands. Their love reaches out beyond them and demands completion. God and the couple loving enough, trusting enough, they allow this love its completion, its fulfillment in God the Creator and the source of life. This couple love and trust in each other and God enough to love another child into existence because God has willed it into being.

The love that unites them, capacitates them, charges them to go beyond themselves to love new life into existence. This capacity of man has its source in man's very being, his nature understood in its most comprehensive sense of total nature—physical, personal, emotional, social, intellectual and spiritual. By protecting the integrity of the unitive/procreative, man safeguards his humanness.

The use of a contraceptive demonstrates a will to suppress fertility, to prevent a baby in this act or a series of acts, and therefore, a will to suppress life. This act of will also demonstrates a lack of love in the refusal of the person to surrender their fertility. The use of contraception also demonstrates an attitude that chooses to withhold trust in God and a disposition to rely, rather, on themselves as the final arbiters of love and life.

For the contracepting couple, the sexual act is a lie because the spouses refuse to give themselves to one another as potential mothers and fathers. They engage in what is only an apparent act of self-surrender. In other words, since the sexual union is no longer the expression of a total gift, it does not mirror the spousal *communion of persons*.¹⁹

Their decision to use contraception shows they are not willing to meet all the demands of this love in every act. They have freely chosen to frustrate this love in its God-oriented completion. Their act of contraceptive sex in marriage works to keep the marital act from reaching its natural stage of humanness that God intended. It is, objectively speaking, reduced to a primitive act of fornication between good people who have learned to be sexually selfish. This act is no longer an act of **human** sexual intercourse. It is an act of lust between people who exchanged more challenging promises. It is a lie. It is a non-human act.

Argument #2: The Completion of the Life Process

Marital love demands completion in openness to life in each act as part of God's plan.

When a married couple initiate the love-making process of human sexual intercourse through a freely chosen act they have simultaneously freely chosen to finish it, complete it—to create more love in their relationship and to create the possibility of more new life. The love-creating and life-creating element of this act cannot be separated for any reason whatsoever because love reaches out to life for completion. The very humanness of the act depends upon that unitive-procreative foundation so necessary to its integrity. Why? Man of all creatures has the intellect and the will, therefore, the freedom to be a co-creator with God through His gift process. As man has been gifted so he has the responsibility. As man has been made "in the image and likeness of

God", the Creator places the obligation of co-creator upon man should he decide to avail himself of the marital act. The conjugal act commits the couple to the possibility of creating new life once they choose to engage in the act. This is the creative plan of God. By choosing the sexual gift, a couple have chosen the entire process and have chosen not to interfere with the love/life process that will now unfold by God's creative hand. Contraception shows a will and an attitude to interfere with a human-divine process where consent has already been given by the couple. The couple show a will, a choice to contradict a previous choice made by engaging in the act and they demonstrate an attitude whereby fertility will be reserved, indeed, removed. This couple wants pleasure without responsibility. They do not want to be co-creator except on their terms; they only want part of the process even though they promised by engaging in the act they would choose both love and life.

This couple is choosing an act that is not a human sexual act. Their choice has changed the objective reality of this act. Their interference constitutes an act of desecration of God's plan.

It is difficult to imagine a greater lack of reverence toward God than interfering with this mystery with desecrating hands in order to frustrate this mystery. How terrible to think of man wanting to destroy this unity which God has established so mysteriously, deeming those united in the highest earthly union of love worthy to take part in His creative power. To go against God's purposes through a desecrating interference, perhaps even thus to throw back into the void a being that God has intended to exist—what sacrilegious presumption!²⁰

Argument #3: Deficiency of Love

Sometimes couples do not realize they do not love each other enough to surrender fully. Everything we do matters.

Contraception demonstrates a deficiency of love and to love. The partners do not love each other enough to make a complete offering of each to the other in each and every act. Further, they do not trust God's judgement of their readiness; they do not trust God enough to invite Him as co-participant in the creative process with which He has gifted them. The process will not work without God its creator. Their reservation about fully participating constitutes a refusal to be participants which, in turn, demonstrates an anti-love and anti-life attitude.

However, the essence of contraceptive behavior is that it is sex with serious reservation. The symbol of total self-giving is contradicted by contraception and, de facto, there is lacking the unreserved gift of self. Because it contradicts the marriage covenant, marital contraception must be evaluated as evil.²¹

Through freely chosen contraceptive acts the couple have shown a withdrawal of necessary trust in and love towards each other and God. Their refusal to be co-creators, collaborators, with God is at the root a refusal to love totally and completely as God demands. Their act is not one of human sexual intercourse as they lack the necessary giving.

Argument #4: From Chasitivity

We must control the marital sexual gift and chastity enables us to pay the proper respect needed to control that gift.

The couple decide not to love totally, therefore, the love/life gifts inscribed in man cannot be released/generated according to God's design. God has designed man with a will to love. It is only when man loves without reservation that the love/life gifts inscribed by God into man's nature can be released. A couple's desire to contracept, a failure to live the virtue of chastity, represents a desire to withhold love of complete surrender to each other. This desire prevents these gifts from being released because they have not given themselves fully. As these gifts are withheld, man does not experience the human growth designed into the act. He does not benefit from the creative forces of love and life the act is designed to produce.

His will to contracept is preventing a creative force designed by God to create more love and life as it is designed to do. Man's choice is causing his creative forces to become frustrated. Human marital love must involve chastity. Chastity is the self-control required in the correct use of God's gift. They can choose the chastity of God's gift of sexual love or the chastity of God's gift of abstaining love.

The sexual gift is an awesomely powerful divine gift. We must have respect for that gift. We must control the sexual gift and chastity enables us to pay the proper respect needed to control that gift. Contraception is an unchaste use of that gift because it is the exploitation of self and others. Contraception is the use of other people for our own pleasure. Contraceptive marital acts violate the virtue of chastity because contraception frustrates the purpose of the marital act and contraception fails to show respect for the marital act. Such an act is not true human sexual marital intercourse.

Pastoral Considerations—A Summary

Taking nothing from what has been said, though the contracepting couple are acting sexually immature, they are praised by secular society for practicing "responsible parenthood". Pastorally, these good people have been misled by ignorance. They were never taught the true sexual freedom of chastity. It is among these good people that the divorce rate is so high because they have been deprived of the truth of the Gospel.

References

1. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Donum Vitae* (Braintree, Massachusetts: Pope John XXIII Medical-Moral Research and Education Center, April, 1987), p. 10.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 10.
3. Pope Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae* (Boston: Daughters of St. Paul, July 25, 1968), p. 7, 8.
4. William E. May, *Sex, Marriage and Chastity* (Chicago, Illinois: Franciscan Herald Press), p. 72.
5. H. Vernan Sattler, C.Ss.R., *Challenging Children to Chastity* (St. Louis, MO: Central Bureau of the Catholic Central Verein of America), p. 13.
6. John Kippley, *Sex and the Marriage Covenant* (Cincinnati, Ohio: The Couple to Couple League International, Inc.), p. 7.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 7.
8. Rhonda Chervin, "Redeeming Sexual Love in Marriage" *Creative Love: The Ethics of Human Reproduction*, ed. John Boyle (Front Royal, VA: Christendom Press), p. 141.
9. Cormac Burke, "Marriage and Contraception" *Creative Love: The Ethics of Human Reproduction* (Front Royal, VA: Christendom Press), p. 155.
10. Richard M. Hogan and John LeVoir, *The Covenant of Love: Pope John Paul II on Sexuality, Marriage and Family in the Modern World* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc.), p. 135-6.
11. H. Vernon Sattler, p. 13.
12. John F. Kippley, *Birth Control and the Marriage Covenant* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press), p. 135-6.
13. Cormac Burke, p. 155.
14. Pope Paul VI, # 11, 2, p. 10.
15. Rev. William B. Smith, S.T.D., "Morality and Sexuality: What The Church Teaches" *Human Sexuality in Our Time: What The Church Teaches*, ed. George A. Kelly (Boston, Mass.: Daughters of St. Paul), p. 154.

16. John Kippley, *Sex and the Marriage Covenant*, p. 55.
17. John Kippley, p. 137.
18. John Kippley, p. 135, 6.
19. Richard M. Hogan and John LeVoir, p. 55.
20. Dietrich von Hildebrand, *Marriage: The Mystery of Faithful Love* (Manchester, New Hampshire: Sophia Institute Press), p. 28.
21. John Kippley, p. 58.