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Biblical Reflections on Co-Creating with the Redeemer

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PANEL I

CO-CREATING
WITH THE CREATOR

14

*Biblical Reflections on
Co-creating with the Redeemer*

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ABSTRACT

The Bible does not explicitly answer questions about co-creating with God and discerning whether to try to have children. In consulting Scripture regarding contemporary concerns, one needs to go beyond historical exegesis. Reading Scripture as God's Word requires seeking what God, the divine author of all of Scripture, is currently saying in the biblical passages under study.

The primary foundation for biblical teaching about marriage and family is Genesis, especially concerning God's original intention in creating marriage (Gen 1-2). Humans are created in the image of God as male and female, and marriage is the two becoming one flesh.

Most of Scripture treats adjustments that were made *after* marriage and family were gravely wounded by human rebellion against the Creator's plan (Gen 3).

The Book of Ruth demonstrates the broader familial contexts and purposes of marriage beyond the couple. The Song of Songs is a powerful poem celebrating the passion, emotion, and love in courtship and marriage. The prophet Hosea portrays the relation of God to his people as that of the covenant between husband and bride, on which the New Testament Letter to the Ephesians builds, in comparing Christian marriage to the mystery or sacrament of Christ's marriage covenant with his bride, the Church. Sayings of Jesus make obvious that after death there will be no more purpose for marriage and procreation in our immortal resurrected bodies. St. Paul develops the meaning of celibacy from these eschatological sayings of Jesus, and discusses a topic closely related to the topics in this conference: temporary sexual abstinence in marriage (see 1 Cor 7).

The more synthetic section on "theology of the body" and magisterial summaries of biblical teaching is structured by the topics introduced in Vatican II's *Gaudium et Spes*: how marriage is ordained toward begetting and educating children; warnings against lust toward one's spouse as supporting communion of persons of equal dignity in marriage; openness to life and Jesus' welcoming of children; co-creating and receptivity to God's gift of life in marriage; and discernment about bringing new life into the world. Specific answers will require the cooperation of theologians and others, as is manifested in the schedule of papers in this conference.

INTRODUCTION

The particular topic of married couples co-creating with God is obviously not explicitly taken up in Scripture. In previous writings, I discussed how one can find biblical guidance for contemporary questions that may not always be expressly treated in biblical texts written two thousand and more years ago (Kurz 2003; Kurz 2004; Kurz 2001). Rather than seeking biblical proof texts or focusing on explicitly legal and ethical passages that relate to sexuality, let us try a more inclusive approach to consulting the entire canon of Scripture for its overall "worldview" on how the complete Bible describes the place of humans as male and female in the world and before their Creator God.

Searching the Scriptures for guidance about contemporary topics requires going beyond historical critical exegeses of particular texts in their original meanings, as much as is possible (e.g., Hahn and Flaherty 2007). For example, this investigation will begin with the classic biblical introduction to the Bible's worldview, the Genesis creation texts, especially those relating to the creation of man and woman and to human rebellion from divine limits in Genesis 1-3. Although critics have long noted that Genesis 1-3 combine two independent accounts of creation, our analysis follows the example of both ancient Jews and Christians, who searched the two accounts together as they are now canonically merged into a single presentation of God's creation of the universe and of humans. Indeed, more recent popes, imitating *Gaudium et Spes* (hereafter GS), treat these two creation accounts as a united, authoritative canonical source in discussing sexuality, marriage, and family. Though the texts are not strung together as if they were identical, they are frequently placed into context together (see for example, GS, no. 50; *Mulieris Dignitatem* [MD], no. 6; Benedict XVI 2006b, *Sunday Angelus*).

As explained in the articles mentioned above, guides to finding the message of Scripture's divine author are the steps recommended in Vatican II's dogmatic constitution on divine revelation, *Dei Verbum* (DV, no. 12 § 4). To make them even more available, they are repeated in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC 1997, nos. 111-114). Because we believe Scripture is divinely inspired, for correct interpretation, "Sacred Scripture must be read and interpreted in the light of the same Spirit by whom it was written" (CCC 1997, no. 111; DV, no. 12; Pius XII 1943, *Divino Afflante Spiritu* [DAS]). Both Vatican II and the *Catechism* then outline a simple three-step process for so interpreting Scripture in the light of the Holy Spirit.

The *Catechism* repeats the three practical steps recommended in *Dei Verbum*: "1. Be especially attentive 'to the content and unity of the whole Scripture'" (CCC 1997, no. 112). Christians interpret Scripture by other parts of both Old and New Testaments, because God is the ultimate author of the entire Bible and he does not contradict himself. "2. Read the Scripture within the 'living tradition of the whole Church'" (CCC 1997, no. 113). Catholics read the Bible as earlier Catholics have interpreted it and lived it through the centuries, for the same Spirit that inspired Scripture has continued to inspire and guide the Church to this day. "3. Be attentive to the analogy of faith.

By 'analogy of faith' we mean the coherence of truths of faith among themselves and within the whole plan of revelation" (CCC 1997, no. 114). For example, believers seeking biblical guidance about relationships among men, women, marriage, and family can understand and relate what the Bible says about these relationships to their own personal experience of these realities and as they are taught and lived in the Church or by relatives or acquaintances from their own or other times and cultures. These approaches provide a good entry into theological interpretation of Scripture for those who are not specialists in biblical studies.¹

SACRED SCRIPTURE RELATING TO MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

"In the Beginning"—

Genesis on God's Original Intention for Man & Woman

The foundational creation texts from Genesis 1-3 have been frequently discussed—more recently and famously by Pope John Paul II in his "Theology of the Body" homilies on Genesis and other scriptures (John Paul II 2006, *Man and Woman*). Still, a summary here of the main teachings of the creation accounts about God, the world, humanity, and the interrelationships among them can provide a necessary foundation for more particular biblical insights concerning marriage and parenthood. These accounts contribute to a "biblical worldview" that can ground and provide a context for biblical considerations of marriage and having children.²

CREATION OF MAN IN THE IMAGE OF GOD AS MALE & FEMALE

The Genesis creation account narrates God's ordering of the world and creation of various material life-forms, from vegetation to water creatures and birds, whom God commanded, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth" (Gen 1:22, RSV). After these early steps in God's creating and ordering the world, including the sexual propagation of animals, Genesis comments, "And God saw that it was good" (Gen 1:25; compare 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21). But after creating humans as male and female in his image and likeness, God exclaimed even more forcefully, "And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was *very good*" (Gen 1:31,

emphasis mine). The fact that Genesis describes God creating everything (including both animal and human sexuality) as *good*, and the human male and female as *very good*, is quite important for discussion about the meaning of human sexuality, marriage, and parenthood. It precludes negative attitudes toward human sexuality and marriage. God created our sexuality as good.

The Bible emphasizes the importance of human creation by presenting God as first pausing to consult with himself about creating man. "Then God said: 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness'" (Gen 1:26a). In the meditations of later Old Testament authors, Second Temple writers, and rabbis, the only living God may have originally been imagined as here addressing his angelic heavenly court. However, almost from the beginning of Christianity, New Testament and Patristic authors understood that the plural "Let us make" prefigured an inner-Trinitarian council among Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. For both Jews and Christians, God's preparatory consultation invests God's creation of humans with great solemnity.

Absolutely foundational in both Jewish and especially Christian meditations on Gen 1:26 is that God made "man in our image, after our likeness." That humans are in the image of God is our principle distinction from the animals that God had created before us. There is a scholarly consensus that it is precisely because humans are "in our image" that they are placed in authority over sub-human material creation as God's image, representative, and steward.³ Many of the Church Fathers who reflected on this verse have concluded that even after human rebellion and alienation from God and the undermining of human authority over nature as a result of the primeval sin in Genesis 3, humans retain the image of God. However, by sin we have lost our likeness to God, which will have to be restored by repentance and holiness of life (Louth 2007).

Jewish and Christian reflections on how humans are in God's image have tended to focus on human endowment with intellect and will. Like God and unlike animals, we have an intellect by which we can know God as our Creator, and we have a will by which we can either return or reject the love that God first offers to us (Williams 2007).

HUMAN AUTHORITY OVER NATURE AS GOD'S IMAGE

Because humans are in the image of God and God's representatives or stewards, God places them in the "garden" of the earth to tend to

the plants and animals it contains. As “in our image,” God orders, “let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth” Gen 1:26b). Humans have God’s delegated authority over animals and nature, but God, the one who created animals and nature “as good,” remains their sole owner.

God’s commission of humans to exercise dominion over and to tend animals and plants and, by extension, the whole earth and all of God’s material nature as God’s “garden,” is based on the human capacity, unlike animals, to plan and make decisions using their intellect and will. For example, God’s gift to the human couple of “every plant yielding seed which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit” to “have them for food” (Gen 1:29), implies human understanding and decisions about how to plant and tend the seeds until the grown plants bear fruit.

Likewise, Genesis 2 shows Adam making decisions in naming the animals (Gen 2:19), and presumably in taking care of them. Thus in Genesis 4, Cain will have agricultural produce from which to offer God “an offering of the fruit of the ground,” and Abel can offer the “firstlings of his flock” (Gen 4:3, 4). The fact that Scripture presumes that humans make decisions about tending animals and plants provides a biblical foundation for further considering the human role in making decisions about their own fertility and sexuality.

What have been vigorously debated, at least since the 1960s, have been the extent and limits of human decisions and control over their fertility and sexuality. Do humans have complete domination over their fertility? Or, like human dominion over everything else in nature, is their dominion over their sexuality limited by God in any way? Humans are manifestly only God’s stewards responsible for making decisions about other aspects of nature. Therefore, although humans have broad authority to develop nature (e.g., by breeding mules from horses and donkeys), they are not owners of nature who can dominate (and pollute) nature in any way that they might wish.

It seems reasonable to suppose that human dominion over their own bodies and sexuality is similarly a stewardship, in which they are responsible to God. This is presumed in non-sexual contemporary cultural contexts in which people are exhorted to be responsible for how they treat their bodies, in order to preserve their health. Abuse of one’s body by smoking, overeating and drinking, and controlled

substances is commonly considered wrong and a “lack of respect” for one’s body (which believers hold is given by the Creator).

Dominion over nature will play an important role in twentieth-century debates about dominion over our sexuality through artificial, chemical, or mechanical contraception, or by fertility procedures, as *in vitro* fertilization (IVF). Genesis already makes clear that human dominion over nature is not the dominion of God, but only a *delegated dominion* that must respect the limits that God places on it. For example, the first creation account narrates limits for both animals and humans, who were given only plants to eat, not other animals (which only occurred after the fall and the flood, Gen 9:3-4). In respect to the sexual begetting of children, Eve’s remark makes clear our human dependence on God. After Adam and Eve had sinned and were banished from Eden, “Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, “I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD” (Gen 4:1). Humans can only beget children “with the help of the LORD.” Therefore, childbearing is not an action autonomous from God, but it is under the Lord’s authority.

IN THE IMAGE OF GOD HE CREATED HIM; MALE & FEMALE
HE CREATED THEM. (GEN 1:27)

The climax of this first creation account is the creation of man: “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” (Gen 1:27). This verse clearly refers to “man” (Hebrew *ha adam*, LXX *ton anthrōpon*) as a genus of being. It shifts to the plural to indicate that this genus of “man” exists as plural and differentiated: “in the image of God he created him; *male and female* he created *them*” (1:27b, emphasis mine). Unlike more philosophical reflections on God’s image that focus on an individual human as possessing the spiritual powers of intellect and will, this verse clearly emphasizes that “man” is in God’s image not only as a solitary individual but as a sexually differentiated but united couple—as “male and female.” This will lead to two kinds of reflections in Christian biblical interpretation. One is on humans in community imaging the Trinity of Divine Persons. The second is on the united (married) male and female *couple* as the human image of God, not just as individual humans (Scola 2005, pp. 42-52).

The blessing that God gives to this human couple becomes also the primeval human commission in creation as originally intended by

God. This commission lays the biblical foundation for all discussions of human sexuality, marriage, and having children. It adds to this human mission to multiply the human race a commission to do the work of tending for God's nature (Gen 1:28).

For an original human couple to spread over the entire earth and tame it, they had to "be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it." Therefore, the more basic human commission is to populate this planet earth. The related and consequent commission is to tend to the earth, as Adam and Eve had tended to plants (and presumably to animals, whom they named) in Eden. This is an intriguing reversal of the attitude of many married couples today, for whom their work and careers are more important than having and raising children. Genesis reveals no conflict in God's creative plan between human population growth, human work with nature, and human respect for earth's ecology.

MARRIAGE & FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS MARRED AFTER HUMAN REBELLION

Human rebellion against the limits God set for them in his original plan of creation, however, significantly damaged God's original intentions for human marriage and family. In place of the "very good" married "two-in-one-flesh" relationship planned by God and attained by mutual and complete self-giving, selfishness and power grabbing invaded the husband-wife interrelationship. Almost of necessity, God's perfect plan gave way to some harsh realities of the fallen condition of marriage and family. A brief summary exposition of Genesis 3 can trace how this came about.

In Genesis 3, God's plan was soon challenged by the tempter, portrayed as a wily serpent, but later in Scripture identified as the devil or Satan (Wis 2:24; John 8:44; Rev 12:9). He challenged the woman about the limits that God placed on what trees they could eat from in Eden. When she exaggerated God's warning not to eat from the one tree in the middle of the garden, "neither shall you touch it" (Gen 3:3), under pain of dying, the devil contradicted God. "But the serpent said to the woman, 'You will not die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil'" (Gen 3:4-5). She put more faith in the affirmation of the serpent than that of God. She and her husband became discontented with God's permission to eat from all but this one tree, for the devil

was tempting them to resist any divine limits, to “be like God, knowing good and evil” (v 5).

The human desire to “be like God” can be called the primeval and underlying temptation, from which flows all others. Humans were rejecting any divine limits over their freedom (having to say “No” to any choice). A similar insistence on the autonomy to decide for oneself what is good and evil in sexual behavior is at the very heart of the modern sexual revolution (Kurz 2003).

The consequence of the human couple’s disobedience to God’s command was immediate and catastrophic. It severely damaged their sexuality, their marriage, and their relationships not only with God but with each other. “Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked” (Gen 3:7). In their new shame at their bodies they tried to cover themselves with fig leaves, no longer completely open to each other. When they heard God approaching, “the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden” (v 8b). Their former friendship with God was replaced by terror at his approach.

When God asked Adam why he was hiding, he answered, “I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself” (v 10b). God immediately designated the heart of the problem as their disobedience. “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?” (v11). Instead of admitting his guilt, the man blames the woman “whom thou gavest to be with me” (implicitly blaming also God, v 12); in turn, she also refuses to take personal responsibility and blames the serpent (v 13). The close friendship between God and humans has been fractured and replaced by human fear of and alienation from God.

God’s curse of the serpent also included a promise of future salvation through the seed of the woman. Both Jewish and Christian readers interpreted this as prophesying a messianic figure who would save humans from the devil. “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel” (Gen 3:15). This is also a promise to heal and exalt marriage, in contrast to its wounding after the Fall (cf., Eph 5).

The “punishments” pronounced on both man and woman signaled a clear end to the paradisiacal conditions of Eden. No longer were husband and wife acting as “two in one flesh” joined together by God, but the relationship between women and men became perverted to

historical conditions quite unjust to women. Regarding the human commission to "increase and multiply and fill the earth" (Gen 1:28), woman's motherly role of bearing children will cost her great suffering. Her relationship with her husband will be degraded from mutual and self-giving love between equals to one of lust and domination (Gen 3:16). This passage has become a classic explanation for the contention between the sexes, which throughout human history (and still today) has been filled with lust, power, domination, abuse, resentment, and hatred.⁴

The second human commission, to "fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth" (Gen 1:28b), will likewise become quite onerous, as expressed in Adam's punishment: "cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth to you" (Gen 3:17-19). Because humans challenged the dominion of God over them, sub-human nature will similarly rebel against dominion of humans over it. Instead of fruit (as in Eden) the earth will produce "thorns and thistles." As the woman will suffer a great deal in her maternal duties, the man will find his efforts to grow food similarly burdensome. God's plan for human love, marriage, family, and work has been deeply wounded.

The Book of Ruth

The Book of Ruth provides complementary insights into God's divine plan for marriage and having children within his more inclusive plan to save and reconcile humans to himself. The presumed cultural background to the account of Ruth and her mother-in-law Naomi is the Israelite law about a close relative providing heirs to the widow of a dead husband in order to preserve and pass on the family inheritance and property.⁵ Not only did the Israelite Naomi's husband die in Moab, but the two sons he left her both also died childless, despite their marriages to Moabite women, Orpah and Ruth.

In effect, Naomi found herself thus abandoned without living heirs to inherit her and her husband's property in Israel and to provide for Naomi in her old age. Naomi, in despair of ever having heirs in Israel, urged her two Moabite daughters-in-law to provide for themselves by seeking new husbands among their Moabite countrymen (Ruth 1:13).

However, the Moabite widow Ruth's fidelity to her Israelite mother-in-law, Naomi, leads Ruth to return to Israel with Naomi and to seek to provide an heir to Naomi and her dead son through marrying a close relative to Naomi and her son, who can fulfill the Old Testament obligation of providing an heir for Naomi and for Ruth's dead husband, Naomi's dead son. Their situation makes clear how critically important marriage and having children are for the perpetuation of a family into future generations and for the preservation of the family's ancestral property. God rewarded Ruth's fidelity to Naomi by caring for Ruth through Boaz, a close relative of her dead husband, who married Ruth and raised up children for her dead husband and for Naomi her mother-in-law. In addition, Ruth's exemplary fidelity to her deceased husband and to Naomi her mother-in-law played an important role in God's more general plan of salvation for Israel. Through her son by Boaz, Obed, Ruth became an ancestress of King David and ultimately of the Messiah and Savior Jesus.⁶

The Song of Songs

The Song of Songs reminds believers of the emotional, romantic, even passionate aspects of married love. It focuses on the unitive aspects of the marriage act, whereas many other Old Testament treatments of marriage put more emphasis on procreation in marriage. Although contemporary culture tends to overdo the romantic and unitive aspects of human sexuality to the neglect of its procreative purposes, within the ancient biblical perspective, the Song of Songs provides an important canonical biblical balance toward the second principal purpose of the marriage act, the unitive.

From very early times, the Song of Songs is interpreted both by Old Testament and later Jewish writers as a symbol of God's spousal love for his people. The Fathers of the Church also explicated this romantic poetry as symbolizing Christ's spousal love for the Church, his Body. The most explicit celebrations of married human sexual love and romance in Scripture become quasi-sacramental signs for the deeply loving covenant union between God and his "Chosen People" and between Christ and his Church.

The Prophets Hosea and Isaiah

The prophets, especially Hosea, frequently compare God's love for his people to a husband's love for his bride (see also *Deus Caritas Est*

[DCE], no. 9). This comparison is a forerunner of the very important New Testament comparison of married love to the love of Christ to his bride, which will transform, elevate, and ennoble the natural beauty and significance of marriage into the supernatural mystery of marriage as a sacrament. Throughout the Old Testament, especially in the prophets, the analogy between human spouses with God and his people deepens insight into the relationship of human married love to God's love for his people that will be further developed in the New Testament.

In Hosea 1, God's offer and human rejection of God's love are portrayed in the living example of marriage to a prostitute who committed adultery with other gods. After God's punishment of his adulterous people, he promises (Hosea 2:14-23) to forgive and restore her, referring to her time in the desert when she was faithful, before going after the pagan god Baal in the promised land: "And in that day, says the LORD, you will call me, 'My husband,' and no longer will you call me, 'My Ba'al.' For I will remove the names of the Ba'als from her mouth, and they shall be mentioned by name no more" (Hos 2:16-17).

Though much less frequently than Hosea, Isaiah, too, compares God's relationship with his people to marriage. Thus, Isaiah 62:5b prophesies: "and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you." In the Old Testament, however, marriage is not just a matter of a closed husband-wife relationship. Marriage, as seen in the Book of Ruth, is meant to bless also extended families and to participate in God's blessing of all people. Thus, the canonical Book of Isaiah has a very strong universalist theme. God's special love for his people is meant to bless not only his chosen people but all nations.

This is vividly portrayed in God's vocation to his Servant, "It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved of Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth" (Is 49:6). Thus, the Old Testament analogy of God's love with married love has a universalist aspect that directly prepares for the New Testament comparison of Jesus as Bridegroom loving his bride the Church for the salvation of all nations. Isaiah's servant theme is applied in the New Testament not only to Jesus (who is called "a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to thy people Israel," Luke 2:32), but also to Sts. Paul and Barnabas ("For so the Lord has commanded

us, saying, 'I have set you to be a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the uttermost parts of the earth,'" Acts 13:47).

NEW TESTAMENT TEXTS IMPORTANT FOR MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

Ephesians 5:21-33

Ephesians reveals an even deeper meaning to the natural covenant of marriage, in which "the two shall become one flesh" (Eph 5:31). Already Jesus in his ministry had made clear that "in the beginning" the husband and wife were to become two in one flesh, joined by God and not to be separated by men (Matt 19:6 and parallels). Because of this divine joining of husband and wife in God's original plan for marriage, Jesus had forbidden divorce and remarriage, despite concessions in the Law due to the people's "hardness of [their] hearts" (Matt 19:8).

The author of Ephesians explores this "two in one" union even further. "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.' This mystery is a profound one, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church" (Eph 5:31-32). Paul is referring to human marriage as a mystery from of old whose meaning is newly revealed in Christ. The natural and divinely instituted covenant of marriage that unites husband and wife is now understood to reveal a new covenant of marriage between Christ and his bridal Church. As Pope John Paul II, interprets it,

The covenant proper to spouses "explains" the spousal character of the union of Christ with the Church, and in its turn this union, as a "great sacrament", determines the sacramentality of marriage as a holy covenant between the two spouses, man and woman (MD, no. 23 §34).

In other words, this physical "two in one" covenanted union of marriage from the creation of the world now carries in Christ an even more profound meaning. Human marriage is now comprehended as a profound mystery that reveals the marital union of Christ and his Church. As created by God "in the beginning," marriage, as God's "two in one" union of husband and wife, was not to be sundered by humans. Now that this same marriage union symbolizes the union of Christ and his Church, it takes on additional qualities from how Christ relates to his Church.

Not only that: the husband in Christian marriage is to relate to his wife as Jesus acted toward his Church. "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her" (Eph 5:25). Husbands are to sacrifice themselves for their wives as Christ gave up his life on the cross for his Church. Compare John 15:13, "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."

Analogously, as Christ is head of the Church, the husband is head of his wife, who should respect him as head in the marriage (Eph 5:22-24). In *Mulieris Dignitatem*, no. 24, however, "The Gospel 'innovation,'" Pope John Paul II re-interprets and applies the introduction to this husband-wife relationship differently from the way it was understood in the ancient household. In light of contemporary experience, the Pope interprets and applies this verse as the Divine Author going beyond the human author's original meaning to enjoin in this verse a *mutual* subordination in marriage. With the help of the introduction, "Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ" (Eph 5:21), the Pope contrasts the one-sided subordination of the Church to Christ to the mutual subordination of wife and husband in the marriage union (MD, no. 24).

This biblical analogy between the husband-wife and Christ-Church relationships, like every analogy, has some elements that are the same and others that differ between the two analogs. The headship of the divine Christ over his human Church far exceeds the husband's headship in a marriage of two humans who are equal in dignity (MD, no. 24).

Even today, parental authority over teenage children can be undermined if the children can play off mother against father to get what they want. This may help explain the strange-sounding conclusion, which enjoins the husband to love but the wife to respect their spouse: "let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband" (perhaps as head of the household vis-a-vis the children, despite their mutual subordination, Eph 5:33).

The translation in Ephesians 5:32 of the Greek *mysterion* as Latin *sacramentum* in the Vulgate, the western Church's official Bible throughout the Middle Ages, may have further facilitated the Catholic interpretation of God's natural creation of marriage as being made in the New Testament a sacrament. Because of Christ, God's beautiful natural marriage covenant has been elevated to a grace-giving sacrament and supernatural covenant between husband, wife, and God.⁷

Jesus on the Eschatological Meaning of Marriage after Death

The New Testament has another development of the doctrine of marriage beyond what is obvious in the Old Testament. It appears in all three Synoptic Gospels when the Sadducees, who do not believe in life after death, challenge Jesus with an example they considered a reduction to absurdity. They cited a widow who married seven brothers in an attempt to provide an heir to her dead husband (see the explanation of this custom in the section on Ruth above). "In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife will the woman be? For the seven had her as wife" (Luke 20:33 parallels Matt 22:28 and Mark 12:23).

Jesus explains that marriage and having children apply only to earthly life. In our resurrected bodies everyone will be immortal. Therefore, there will be no need to have children to carry on the next generation after the current one dies. Luke's version states this more clearly than do the parallel passages in Matthew (22:30) or Mark (12:25):

And Jesus said to them, "The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage; but those who are accounted worthy to attain to that age and to the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage, for they cannot die any more, because they are equal to angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection" (Luke 20:34-36).

Jesus clearly indicates that sexual intercourse and having children only pertain to our earthly life. It no longer will exist in our future lives in our resurrected, spiritualized, and immortal bodies. Although married sexual intercourse now has two main purposes, unitive for the spouses and procreative to carry on the human race, there will no longer be any reason for, or existence of, sexual intercourse in the resurrected life. This emphatically underlines the purpose for marital union given in Genesis and presumed throughout the Old Testament: "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth" (Gen 1:28). Procreation is the purpose that is indispensable for true marriage, and helps explain why marriage can only be between man and woman and must be open to giving life.

St. Paul on Abstinence in Marriage in 1 Corinthians 7

Jesus' answer about the eschatological standing of marriage and married love brings out another facet of their meaning, which St. Paul will develop in his treatment of Christian celibacy in 1 Corinthians 7.

Before getting to that topic, however, Paul emphasizes that both husband and wife have equal rights and claims on each other's sexuality, while retaining the biblical and traditional belief that the husband is head of the marriage.

The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. For the wife does not rule over her own body, but the husband does; likewise the husband does not rule over his own body, but the wife does. Do not refuse one another except perhaps by agreement for a season, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, lest Satan tempt you through lack of self-control (1 Cor 7:3-5).⁸

Pope John Paul II comments about conjugal relations and periodic abstinence:

St. Paul clearly says that both conjugal relations and the voluntary periodic abstinence of the spouses must be a fruit of the "gift of God," which is their "own," and that the spouses themselves, by consciously cooperating with it, can keep up and strengthen their reciprocal personal bond together with the dignity that being "temple[s] of the Holy Spirit who is in [them]" (see 1 Cor 6:19) confers on their bodies (John Paul II 2006, [1986], *Man and Woman*, 85:7).⁹

A key point here is that both marital relations and voluntary abstinence come as a "gift of God," with which the spouses cooperate. In the context of Natural Family Planning (NFP), this gift would involve not only the sacramental grace of marriage but also the more particular spiritual gift of discerning when to have relations and when to abstain. This "gift of God" and this principle are critical in couples' decisions concerning, and practice of, NFP.

Paul discusses abstinence in order to "devote yourselves to prayer." Of course, he cannot envisage NFP's future use of natural fertile and infertile periods to try to achieve or temporarily avoid pregnancy. Yet, because NFP involves similar decisions to abstain from marital intercourse as those mentioned by Paul, these decisions likewise have to be mutually agreed upon by both spouses. NFP cannot work without the cooperation of both partners. Paul's concern about excessively long times of abstinence in marriage becoming temptations to sin also provides a caution regarding contemporary NFP, if or when its practice seems to require excessively long abstinence. Awareness of this concern continues to spur NFP teachers to find ever more accurate ways

to determine the fertile period in attempts to shorten the periods of abstinence for couples seeking to avoid a pregnancy in their current cycle.

Celibacy & Marriage in 1 Corinthians 7

St. Paul, who, like Jesus, remained celibate, also uses Jesus' eschatological emphasis on the coming of the "End Times" to discuss celibacy as a Christian alternative to marriage. Paul would wish others to remain "as I myself am," that is, celibate. "But each has his own special gift from God, one of one kind and one of another." (1 Cor 7:7) Both Christian marriage and celibacy are gifts or vocations from God, and each must follow his or her own vocation.

Paul admits that for his advice to the unmarried, he has "no command of the Lord, but I give my opinion as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy. I think that in view of the present distress it is well for a person to remain as he is." (1 Cor 7:25-26) Reference to "the present distress" refers to Paul's belief that end of the world will occur quite soon amidst great destruction and suffering. "For the form of this world is passing away" (1 Cor 7:31). In light of this expected traumatizing end of the world, Paul's opinion is that "it is well for a person to remain as he is," without taking on new responsibilities and commitments, such as marriage and family if one is currently single.

For Paul, however, the strongest argument for remaining celibate rather than marrying is the greater opportunity that celibacy offers for completely single-minded devotion to the Lord.

I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to please the Lord; but the married man is anxious about worldly affairs, how to please his wife, and his interests are divided. And the unmarried woman or girl is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to be holy in body and spirit; but the married woman is anxious about worldly affairs, how to please her husband. I say this for your own benefit, not to lay any restraint upon you, but to promote good order and to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord (1 Cor 7:32-35).

Paul's own celibacy frees him for completely "undivided devotion to the Lord" in his constant travel, frequent and mortal dangers, and considerable sufferings. This would not be as easy for him if he had to be concerned about a spouse (with children usually presupposed).

Among the important "worldly affairs, how to please his wife" (or her husband), are decisions about having and raising children.

Of course "devotion to the Lord" is the task of every Christian, and Christian love is much more inclusive than love in marriage and celibacy. Married love must be understood in the context of this greater love, as it is especially beautifully expressed in 1 John:

Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God; for God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No man has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us (1 John 4:7-12, RSV).

"THEOLOGY OF THE BODY" AND MAGISTERIAL SUMMARIES OF BIBLICAL TEACHING

One way to organize biblical information culled from all over the canonical Bible about human cooperation with God in procreation is to use magisterial summaries of biblical teaching, including Pope John Paul II's "Theology of the Body." This is analogous to how the Church Fathers often used the Nicene Creed to organize biblical evidence scattered throughout the Bible that reveal and relate to God as Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

A helpful introduction, therefore, may be to quote from Vatican II's *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* (*Gaudium et Spes* [GS]).

Marriage and conjugal love are by their nature ordained toward the begetting and educating of children. Children are really the supreme gift of marriage and contribute very substantially to the welfare of their parents. The God Himself Who said, "it is not good for man to be alone" (Gen. 2:18) and "Who made man from the beginning male and female" (Matt. 19:4), wishing to share with man a certain special participation in His own creative work, blessed male and female, saying: "Increase and multiply" (Gen. 1:28). Hence, while not making the other purposes of matrimony of less account, the true practice of conjugal love, and the whole meaning of the family life which results from it, have this aim: that the couple be ready

with stout hearts to cooperate with the love of the Creator and the Savior, who through them will enlarge and enrich His own family day by day (GS, no. 50).

Marriage as by Nature Ordained toward Begetting & Educating Children

The main points that Vatican II makes, that marriage naturally tends toward the "begetting and educating of children," and that children are "the supreme gift of marriage," could hardly be more counter-cultural. Catholic tradition in this case remains quite thoroughly biblical.

In Genesis, the original intent of marriage is manifestly to "increase and multiply and fill the earth" (Gen 1:28). One of the biggest marital tragedies in Scripture is childlessness, which is regarded as a curse and disgrace, as is illustrated in several accounts of sterile wives like Sarah, Hannah and Elizabeth. Children and large families are consistently regarded as special gifts of God. In both Old and New Testaments, widows whose only children die are objects of special compassion of the prophet Elijah (1 Kings 17:17-24) and of Jesus (Luke 7:11-16). In the Old Testament, the Fourth Commandment and several wisdom passages focus on the raising and education of children and their relationships to their parents. New Testament letters similarly contain exhortation on the proper raising of children (as in Eph 6). Overall, in Scripture, marriage usually presupposes families and children and all that pertains to them.

Of course, the Bible also reports many negative examples of marriage and sexual practices that follow from the fallen conditions of human sexuality and marriage. Scripture often treats these as detrimental cases that illustrate the dire consequences of such misuse of marriage or sexuality (e.g., Sarah's taking it into her own hand to make up for her own childlessness through her maid Hagar: see Gen 16 and 21:9-21). However, the Bible often shows how God uses even these negative actions as part of his plan for nations (Hagar's exiled son thus also becomes the father of an important nation, Gen 21:13). Matthew's genealogy has the surprising insertion of four Old Testament women whose questionable sexual history or behavior God used to continue the messianic line from which came the Savior Jesus (Matt 1:1-11).

The major biblical focus regarding marriage remains on the couples' generously cooperating with God in raising and educating new human

life. As Eve said when Cain was born shortly after her expulsion from Eden, "I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD" (Gen 4:1). The very atmosphere of Scripture is quite alien to widespread contemporary reluctance about having children and exaggerated attempts to limit children.

Perhaps at least partially for this reason, there is little explicit treatment in Scripture of some of the topics and foci of this conference—on how parents cooperate with God by making decisions regarding when and how many children to bring into the world. In unusual biblical situations where avoiding children is desirable, there is an example of David refusing to have children from Michal, Saul's daughter. He simply spurned intercourse with her, because she despised him when he carelessly exposed himself while wildly dancing before the Lord (2 Sam 6:16, 20-23). In context below, we will discuss a highly unusual situation in Scripture in which someone tries to avoid having children while still having intercourse (Gen 38:8-10).

BIBLICAL SUPPORT FOR COMMUNION OF PERSONS IN MARRIAGE

A major component of the biblical worldview about marriage is the importance of complete giving of self and acceptance of one's spouse as a human person in his or her own right, never as an object of one's own desires. There were some shocked objections to the argument that Pope John Paul II used to emphasize the need to treat one's spouse as a person, not an object. He quoted Jesus' statement in the Sermon on the Mount about the commandment, "You have heard that it was said, You shall not commit adultery," as contrasted with Jesus' even more radical judgment, "But I say to you that every one who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matt 5:27-28). The Pope argued from this contrast that even in marriage, one can treat one's spouse with lust, which is sinful because it does not respect the spouse as a person. This application goes beyond the original point of Jesus' saying, but it is not incompatible with Jesus' message.

This saying of Jesus occurs in a section of the sermon that is referred to as the "antitheses" (Matt 5:21-48). In the first antithesis, Jesus refers to the commandment not to kill, which he internalizes and radicalizes to not even nursing anger at another. The second antithesis expands the commandment not to commit adultery to include not even looking at another with lust. Through these antitheses, Jesus goes beyond

what the Law literally forbids, like killing and adultery, to include interior dispositions, like anger and lust.

The importance of this antithesis is that it clearly exemplifies the biblical worldview about the meaning of sexual love in marriage. It is clear that for Jesus, morality extends much deeper than external keeping of a command. Jesus demands that one's heart has the attitude required to be able to live the commandments with more honesty than mere legalistic conformity to them. The reminder that one can regard even one's spouse immorally with lust provides an attention-getting illustration of the importance of treating one's spouse with love and respect as an equal person. This instruction reinforces the biblical perspective on marriage as a communion of two persons equally worthy of respect in the dignity of each and of both together as image of God.

OPENNESS TO LIFE: JESUS, 'LET THE CHILDREN COME TO ME'

Especially because Scripture treats children as the normal result of married love and its greatest gift, married openness to conceiving life is usually presupposed. We have already repeatedly mentioned how the Bible presumes that marital sexual relations will be open to conceiving children and will do nothing to impede such conception. One secondary reason why the story of Jesus receiving children may have been preserved in the Gospels (besides its primary lesson about entering the Kingdom as children) may have been to illustrate Jesus' love of, and openness toward, children. In Mark 10:13-16 and its parallels in Matthew and Luke, Jesus rebukes his disciples for trying to keep children away from him. When the annoyed male disciples try to keep little children from bothering Jesus, he forcefully rebukes them and accepts and tenderly blesses the children (Mark 10:13-16 [parallels Matt 19:13-15 and Luke 18:15-17]). Although this incident has a different historical referent, it can also be applied to illustrate a theological argument that Jesus demonstrated a very positive attitude toward children, which can challenge the contemporary hostility toward having more than a minimum number of children.

CO-CREATING & RECEPTIVITY TO GOD'S GIFT OF LIFE IN MARRIAGE

Although the titles of several of these conference presentations use the word *co-creating*, a married Catholic student with children who is writing his Marquette dissertation on marriage strongly suggests focusing less on co-creating children with God and more on children as

God's supreme gift in marriage.¹⁰ Focus on children as gift would help a couple be less susceptible to the temptation to try themselves to be in complete control of outcomes (like having or not having children). It would help them become more focused on remaining receptive to divine gifts regarding children as they cooperate with God's desire to give the couple the gift of children. Mary is the supreme exemplar of this kind of parental receptivity to God's gift of a child. Despite her genuine and realistic unease ("How shall this be, since I have no husband?" [Luke 1:34]), she gave God her unreserved "yes" to his offer of a child: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be done to me according to your word" (Luke 1:38).

The biblical perspective on marriage certainly presupposes that spouses make decisions about having children, but that it is God who actually either gifts them with a child or leaves them childless. Natural Family Planning (NFP) provides contemporary couples more information than biblical couples had to enable them to cooperate with God more intentionally and with more comprehension, because it helps them to distinguish between the times when the woman is fertile and other times when she is not.

There is nothing in Scripture that would forbid parents to use such knowledge in efforts to cooperate with the divinely created fertility cycle of the women. At the same time, the biblical worldview does not support a "providentialist" insistence that couples should blindly use marital intercourse and leave the results entirely to providence to provide for the marriage and all children so conceived (even when this is sometimes irresponsible, as when the wife has a life-threatening illness).¹¹

Nevertheless, even when using NFP, the biblical worldview presumes a situation in which couples must be open to God's will regarding whether their efforts will succeed or fail as to conception or temporary avoidance of a child. Scripture manifestly portrays God, the creator of marriage, as remaining in charge of all that issues from marriage. Couples cooperate with God's will by always acting virtuously and according to God's commandments in the ways they try to have children.

DISCERNMENT OF BRINGING NEW LIFE INTO THE WORLD

To go beyond what has already been presented requires going beyond historical exegesis to a more theological approach that takes into

account not only the entire biblical canon but also how Scripture has been interpreted in Church tradition and by Catholic authors. This is the more immediate concern of other presentations in this conference. However, it is important for exegetes also to try to make at least some attempts toward a response to this topic. Since I am trained as a Jesuit, I will turn to St. Ignatius Loyola, founder of the Jesuits, for some inspiration from his very Catholic understanding and application of his genuine biblical perspective to questions of discernment.

Because my answer is more general and less directly responding to how to discern whether to try to conceive children, I will not turn to Saint Ignatius's "Rules for Discernment of Spirits." Instead, I will consult his final contemplation that summarizes the fruit of his *Spiritual Exercises*, his "Contemplation to Gain Love" (Ignatius Loyola). This contemplation for love seems particularly appropriate for couples discerning God's will with regard to having children.

St. Ignatius begins his contemplation to obtain love with two very practical presuppositions: "the first is that love ought to be put more in deeds than in words. The second, love consists in interchange between the two parties; that is to say in the lover's giving and communicating to the beloved what he has or out of what he has or can." Obviously, discernment about having children has to take place in a context of the mutual love of the spouses. This love is not primarily a matter of emotions or words, but is demonstrated in deeds of love that the couple practices toward each other. By their loving deeds, the couple strives constantly toward greater mutual love. As their love and virtue grow, they will become more able to discern God's will about when to have children. Their love will also overflow to the children they have or will have.

Secondly, love shares what each person has with the beloved. In this case, each spouse would share with the beloved his or her insights, desires, sense of God's will for their marriage and family. They will also share in the work of maintaining a household and family. As they share generously with each other, the couple increases in the virtue of generosity, which is essential to having and raising children. Although the Bible does not tell each particular couple how many children to try for, it certainly presumes and promotes parents' generosity toward having children, and that they would not selfishly limit the number of their children merely for their personal comfort or convenience.

St. Ignatius prepares for his contemplation on love by telling the one praying "to ask for interior knowledge of so great good received, in order that being entirely grateful, I may be able in all to love and serve His Divine Majesty" (Ignatius, "Contemplation to Gain Love, Second Prelude," § 29). Before one can receive more grace from God and become more generous toward God and one's family, he or she must become ever more grateful for what God has already given. This gratitude is required to "be able in all to love and serve his Divine majesty" (Ignatius, "Contemplation to Gain Love, Second Prelude," § 29). Gratitude is one form of recognizing our dependence on God. Especially in its many accounts of frustrated sterile couples, Scripture makes eminently clear that to have children husband and wife are completely dependent on God giving them the gift of conceiving a new life.

In his "Second Point" of the contemplation, St. Ignatius instructs the one praying to "look how God dwells in creatures, in the elements, giving them being, in the plants vegetating, in the animals feeling in them, in men giving them to understand: and so in me, giving me being, animating me, giving me sensation and making me to understand." (Ignatius, "Contemplation to Obtain Love, Second Point," §29). This insight into how God lives and works in all creatures, including the married couple, provides a very important context for understanding "co-creation." Recognizing that God works in and through a couple's natural powers reminds them of their dependence on God, even when they are making love to each other and doing what they can to facilitate God's creation of a new human soul and life. It guards against the all too human temptation to think and act as if they were equal to God and in control of the results of their marital union.

CONCLUSION

Scripture does not explicitly treat the topic of this presentation—parents co-creating with God and discerning when to bring new life into the world. It does, however, provide definite (though currently countercultural) viewpoints on the meanings and purposes of marriage and having children by which to ground such discernment. The worldview of Scripture clearly demonstrates that God created marriage as very good, and that children are the supreme gift of marriage. Scripture also presupposes that married couples make decisions about trying to have children or not, but usually with the expectation of the blessing of a good number of children.

For explicit guidance on just how parents are to discern whether they should try for another child, readers of Scripture have to go beyond the Bible's historical portrayal of marriage in the ancient biblical cultures and world. A complete answer requires interdisciplinary contributions from several areas of theology, philosophy, medical, and other fields. Still, biblical specialists also ought to contribute to this effort by themselves trying to apply Scripture through theological interpretation to such contemporary questions. This presentation is one such attempt by a biblical specialist, which appears in the context of this conference alongside theological, anthropological, and other presentations making similar attempts. It is hoped that this presentation can provide some biblical grounding for the fuller answers attainable through other approaches.

END NOTES

1. On theological interpretation of Scripture, see Kurz (2007), "Developing a Theological Approach to Scripture," pp. 45-67.
2. On the "biblical worldview," see Johnson and Kurz (2002), Chapter 8 [Kurz], "Voices in the Church: Preunderstandings in Applying Scripture," pp. 182-202; see especially "Finding a Broader Context for Arguments," pp. 186-88, which treats the "biblical worldview." Compare Johnson's complementary analogy, "Imagining the World that Scripture Imagines," Chapter 5, pp. 119-142, along with Chapter 6, "Bill Kurz: Response to Luke Johnson," esp. pp. 147, 151-54.
3. Compare Holmes (2005), pp. 318-319; Curtis 1992, pp. 389-391; Goshen-Gottstein (1994), pp. 171-195.
4. See Ramsey (1988), pp. 56-86; John Paul II (2006), Audiences 29-31; see also Griffiths (2009), on post-lapsarian desire in general, pp. 27-30.
5. For the law about marrying the widow of a brother to provide the brother an heir and preserve their family property inheritance, see Deut 25:5-10. "If brothers dwell together, and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the dead shall not be married outside the family to a stranger; her husband's brother shall go in to her, and take her as his wife, and perform the duty of a husband's brother to her. And the first son whom she bears shall succeed to the name of his brother who is dead, that his name may not be blotted out of Israel" (vv 5-6). If the brother refuses to do this, he faces public legal shame: "then his brother's wife shall go up to him in the presence of the elders, and pull his sandal off his foot, and spit in his face; and she shall answer and say, 'So shall it be done to the man who does not build up his brother's house'" (v 9). The list in 1 Chronicles 23:21-22 provides a slightly different case, but one related to this law: "The sons of

Mahli: Elea`zar and Kish. Elea`zar died having no sons, but only daughters; their kinsmen, the sons of Kish, married them”).

These laws should be understood within the broader context of Old Testament laws relating to marriage and property. Thus Numbers 36:1-9 forbids marrying outside one's tribe, lest the ancestral lands of one's tribe be transferred to another tribe. See especially, “Let them marry whom they think best; only, they shall marry within the family of the tribe of their father. The inheritance of the people of Israel shall not be transferred from one tribe to another; for every one of the people of Israel shall cleave to the inheritance of the tribe of his fathers” (Num 36:6-7).

6. See Anderson (2008), pp. 31-34. Anderson points to two texts in Ruth that relate conjugal love and divine love. In Ruth 2:11-12, Boaz explains why he was helping Ruth. He had heard of all she had done for her mother-in-law Naomi. He continued, “The LORD recompense you for what you have done, and a full reward be given you by the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge!” (v12). In Ruth 3:9-10, when Ruth surprised Boaz at night, she both identified herself and proposed marriage: “I am Ruth, your maidservant; spread your skirt [Hebrew also means *wing*] over your maidservant, for you are next of kin” (Ruth 3:10). As Anderson explains, “God will spread his wings (*kanaf*) over Ruth through agency of Boaz's robe (*kanaf*). ... her enjoyment of divine protection will be mediated through Boaz in marriage” (p. 33).

Anderson's conclusion is especially pertinent to our topic. “The Book of Ruth tells us that within the sacred bond of marriage there lies a symbol of the love of God for humanity. ... Human marriage is an analogical expression of the love of God for his people” (p. 33). This was already true in the Old Testament.

7. Scholarly treatments of Ephesians 5:21-33 are deeply divided, often along ideological lines, with concerns about subordination of women and the relationship of Paul's treatments of marriage and celibacy. Recent examples include Kleinig (2005) and Osiek (2002). Papal and other Catholic interpretations offer an understanding of the texts that do not distort the texts to fit one another.
8. See some helpful historical context in Peterman (1999). Another article reviews the scholarly disagreement over whether Paul is endorsing spiritual marriage, and how this thinking deeply influenced the early church (see Peters 2002).
9. John Paul II (2006), Audience 85:7, p. 456 in context of Audiences 83-85.
10. Kent Lasnoski, ABD (Marquette University, Department of Theology), made these observations in June, 2010, to my research assistant, Anne Carpenter.

11. Against "providentialism," see Curtis and Michaelann Martin (2007), pp.144-46. Compare Brugger (2010a): "The answer is 'no,' NFP is not unqualifiedly good and can be used wrongly. The reason for this is subtle and needs to be stated carefully, because there is a popular, although erroneous, belief among some Catholic couples that NFP is 'second best,' and that if a couple is seriously Catholic, they will not self-consciously plan the children they conceive, but simply 'let God send them.' I do not mean to offend anyone's practices, but this 'come what may' attitude is found nowhere in Catholic teaching on procreation in the last 150 years. There is no decision more serious to a Catholic couple than whether or not to participate with God in bringing a new human person into existence."

Ethicist Kevin Miller makes an important distinction regarding this response in an email: "RE: ZENIT: Just Cause and Natural Family Planning," June 17, 2010. "I would say that it isn't that NFP isn't good when used with a wrong intention—it's that NFP is still good but the intention and therefore also the action as a whole are wrong."

In a follow-up article on ZENIT, Brugger (2010b) offers the following response: "I am happy to speak further on the question of *just causes* for spacing births. Some may believe that only extraordinary situations can constitute legitimate reasons for practicing NFP to defer pregnancy (e.g., severe illness of a spouse; extreme financial difficulties; mental breakdown, etc.). In my opinion, this extreme interpretation is incorrect and can result in avoidable harms."

"A few concrete examples of *iustae causae* for deferring pregnancy might include:

- 1) Physical or mental illness of one of the spouses;
- 2) Serious financial instability (e.g., during a period of unemployment);
- 3) Needs arising from caring for "high-needs" children;
- 4) The instability of transitional periods such as spouses in graduate school;
- 5) Debilitating stress that can arise from having a large family in societies where large families are no longer valued (see *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 50)."

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