



# Body and Soul

A reflection for couples called to the vocation of marriage on the 40th anniversary of *Humanae Vitae*

By Bishop Robert J. Carlson, Diocese of Saginaw

Dear Friends in Christ,

It is with great hope, and some trepidation, that I offer these reflections on the vocation of marriage. Great hope, because the God-given truth about marriage is good news for our time, and I know that people hunger for the truth. Some trepidation, as well, because I know how resistant our culture is to embracing the truth. But we are called to live and proclaim our faith boldly, so that hearts may be converted to Jesus Christ!

These reflections are not only intended for those called to the vocation of marriage, but also for those who are involved with marriage preparation and renewal, and for anyone who cares deeply about the state of marriage in the Church and in the world. General statistics and painful individual experiences show that ours is truly a time of crisis when it comes to marriage and family life!

I certainly hope that this booklet will be used in marriage preparation and marriage renewal classes. More broadly, I hope that it will stir many people to reflect more deeply on the meaning of our experience as men and women, and the meaning of marriage as a way of living out the faith.

To those who want to understand the meaning of marriage and those who are drawn to the “abundant life” that is offered through it, to those who have been living in its graces and all those who work to support and sustain healthy marriages: let us work together to build a civilization of love!

Sincerely yours in Christ,



Most Reverend Robert J. Carlson  
Bishop of Saginaw

July 25, 2008  
*40th Anniversary of Humanae Vitae*



## 1. Body and soul

Sometimes we laugh. Sometimes we cry. If you stop and think about it, those simple facts tell us something significant: there is a deep connection between the body and the soul. When our soul is filled with joy or sadness, that truth of the spirit finds its expression in an action of the body: laughter or tears.

Our experience of the link between the soul and the body doesn't stop there. In fact, laughter and tears are only the tip of the iceberg.

Being nervous is not just a state of mind, it's accompanied by sweaty palms and butterflies in our stomach. Happiness spontaneously shows itself in a smile, and joy lights up a person's whole face. Confusion automatically wrinkles the brow. Pride in an achievement – whether our own or our children's – sometimes literally swells the chest. Anger clenches our jaw and our fists.

In these and many other ways, we experience the intimate connection between body and soul. Our body displays our inner reality quite constantly.

Might it work the other way, as well? That

is to say, our examples show that the state of the soul shapes the actions of the body. Can the actions of the body also shape the state of the soul? I think they can.

Think back to when you were a child. Did your parents or some respected adult ever tell you they were pleased with you, or express their approval for a job well done? How far did a gentle pat on the back (or on the head) go toward helping to reinforce their approval, and really bring it home to your heart?

Consider a friend facing difficult times: a simple touch on the shoulder can say “I'm here for you,” in a way that words by themselves could never do.

Consider a stiff, formal handshake or hug compared to one that is heartfelt. One touches the soul, the other does not.

These simple reflections on our everyday experience abundantly illustrate two truths:

**1) We express truths of the soul through the body.**

**2) We receive truths into the soul through the body.**



## 2. A claim and a challenge

Against the background of these reflections, I want to make a claim and, lovingly but forthrightly, issue a challenge.

The claim is this: Our faith (or lack of faith) is not only expressed in what we believe and don't believe with our minds, it is also expressed in what we do and don't do with our bodies.

The point is obvious, in one sense. Still, because it is often overlooked today – sometimes deliberately and sometimes inadvertently, but with harmful consequences in either case – it has to be re-stated. Faith is not only a matter of what we think and say, but also a matter of what we do. That is why Saint James says “Demonstrate your faith to me without works, and I will demonstrate my faith to you from my works.” (James 2:18)

The challenge follows: What we believe in our faith and what we do with our bodies should be consistent with each other. This

is a simple matter of integrity. Just as we should speak in a way that is consistent with our faith, so also we should act in a way that is consistent with our faith.

**What we believe in our faith and what we do with our bodies should be consistent with each other.**

And that is why, on the 40th anniversary of its publication, I want to encourage all Catholics in the Diocese of Saginaw to get a copy of Pope Paul VI's encyclical letter *Humanae Vitae* (Of Human Life) and read it. I believe many people, including people who have every intention of living as good and faithful Catholics, are acting in a way that is contrary to the faith and at odds with what is humanly good by using contraception. Whether knowingly or



unknowingly, they are using their bodies in a way that contradicts God's love for them, as well as their love for each other. I believe the consequences of this contradiction are gravely harmful to marriages and to society.

Many couples have never heard this teaching, or never heard it explained in a way that made sense to them. Therefore I want to mark the 40th anniversary of *Humanae Vitae* by re-stating the Church's teaching, and explaining why contraception is contrary to God's plan for married life, and contrary to the true meaning of married love.

## 3. Body Language

Words can be used to express truth or to lie.

If the words correspond to the facts (“Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger became Pope Benedict XVI”) then we say they are true. If the words do not correspond to the facts (“Pope Benedict XVI was the youngest pope ever”) then we say they are false. And if the words are false because we deliberately manipulated them, then we say they are a lie.

In similar fashion, bodies can be used to express truth or falsehood. How do we tell the difference between truth and falsehood spoken in “body language”? A few simple examples may help.

If a car salesman smiles and shakes my hand when he just knowingly sold me a lemon, then he has “spoken” falsely with his body. When Judas greeted Christ with the kiss of friendship in the Garden of Gethsemane, he was “speaking” falsely with his body.

As with the spoken word, the question is whether the “body language” corresponds to the facts. If the action (“I greet you with the kiss of friendship”) corresponds to the facts (we meet as friends), then the body language is true. If the action (“I greet you with the kiss of friendship”) does not correspond to the facts (I have betrayed you), then the body language is false. And if the body language is false because



we knowingly made it that way, then we can accurately say that we are lying with our body.

That, in a nutshell, is the problem with contraception. It is a falsehood spoken with the body.

Sexual intercourse contains an inherent language of giving and receiving. With their bodies, spouses are saying to each other, “I give myself to you completely and without reservation, holding nothing back” and “I accept your total gift of self.”

But when a couple uses contraception, they are deliberately holding something back: their fertility. With their bodies they are saying “I give you all that I am and have”; but, in fact, they are not giving something: their fertility. With their bodies they are saying “I accept the gift of all that you are and have”; but, in fact, they do not accept one



**If we can distinguish between speaking the truth and speaking falsehood with our bodies, then we can build our marriages – and our culture – on a sure foundation.**

another's fertility. The complete self-giving and receiving, inherent in the body language of sexual intercourse, no longer corresponds to the facts. At this intimate moment in their marriage, a false note has entered the conversation and has done so by the couple's deliberate choice. This choice for falsehood cannot fail to have serious consequences, both for marriages and for society.

The broader problem, of course, is that the

## 4. The meaning of the Body

The meaning of the body, according to the Catholic faith, is grounded on two basic truths. The first is that we are made in the image and likeness of God. This is one of the first things we learn in Scripture:

*God created man in his image, in the divine image he created him, male and female he created them. (Gen. 1:27)*

The second is that we are made in the image and likeness of God as embodied

falsehood of contraception has become part of the native language of our culture. It is one of many ways that we have learned to speak a language that degrades the true meaning of the body. The consequences of this degradation are evident in how the body is treated in newspapers, on television and all over the Internet. Our culture is in serious crisis when it comes to the meaning of the body!

But Jesus said that if we remained in his word we would know the truth, and the truth would set us free (Jn 8:31-2).

We need to return to the true meaning and dignity of the body as revealed by Jesus. If we do that, we can distinguish between speaking the truth and speaking falsehood with our bodies. Then we can build our marriages – and our culture – on a sure foundation.

creatures. God did not make us pure spirits, as he made the angels. The Catechism of the Catholic Church puts it this way:

*God fashioned man with his own hands and impressed his own form on the flesh he had fashioned, in such a way that even what was visible might bear the divine form. (CCC, 704)*

So our bodies have a meaning. That meaning was established by God in creation.

And it is known by constant reference to God, whose image and likeness is written into our bodies.

**In refusing to condone contraception, the Church is presenting and defending the revealed truth that we are made in the image and likeness of God.**

This message may be difficult to hear, because we live in a culture that has drifted far from God's word. But the Church must never grow tired of presenting and defending God's word, because it contains the truth that will set us free. The revealed truth

about the meaning of the body challenges us, and challenges our culture, to distinguish between speaking truly with our bodies and speaking falsely with our bodies. If our culture doesn't want to hear that challenge – especially because it doubts our ability to distinguish between truth and falsehood – we can only continue to issue an invitation and make it clear: It is the Word of God, not the words of men, that our culture risks rejecting.

Let's take a closer look at some particular ways in which contraception violates the truth and falsifies the meaning of the body.







## 5. A communion of persons: marriage and the trinity

Jesus reveals to us that God is the Trinity – three divine persons in one being. This has implications for what it means to live in the image and likeness of God. What does our belief in the Trinity tell us about who we are and how we are called to live?

We may not often think about it, but one of the first things we can notice is that the Trinity is a communion of persons, and marriage involves a communion of persons. Drawing on this parallel, the Catechism says:

*God is love and in himself he lives a mystery of personal loving communion. Creating the human race in his own image... God inscribed in the humanity of man and woman the voca-*

*tion, and thus the capacity and responsibility, of love and communion. (CCC 2331)*

From the beginning, God made us male and female. One reason for this is so that our bodies would be capable of entering into a communion of persons – thereby being, in some sense, a visible image of the Trinity.

**From the beginning, God made us male and female. One reason for this is so that our bodies would be capable of entering into a communion of persons.**

We can take this parallel one step further: the Trinity is a communion of persons whose union brings forth life, and the one flesh union of man and woman in marriage involves a communion of persons whose union has the capacity to bring forth life. Many people have never thought about this parallel between the fruitfulness of marriage and the fruitfulness of the Trinity. But the catechism draws on it when it says:

*The union of man and woman in marriage is a way of imitating in the flesh the Creator's generosity and fecundity: 'Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh.' All human generations proceed from this union. (CCC 2335)*

Every sacrament takes an invisible reality and, somehow, makes it visible. A sacramental marriage makes visible the fact that everything that exists is grounded in the loving interaction of the divine communion of persons. Because it will seem new to many people, this point needs to be emphasized: marriage is meant to be a kind of living icon of the Blessed Trinity. Perhaps Pope John Paul II put it best when he said:

*Man became the image of God not only through his own humanity, but also through the communion of persons, which man and woman form from the very beginning.*

*(Theology of the Body, 9.3)*

If we take our faith in the Trinity seriously, then we believe that we are made in the image and likeness of a God who is a communion of persons. Therefore a call to communion is written into our nature. And this call to communion is not only a spiritual reality. It is also



written into our bodies. Marriage is a way of responding to this call.

Our belief that we are made in the image and likeness of the Trinity can help to explain why the Church opposes contraception. The Trinity is a complete communion of persons whose union brings forth life. But a couple using contraception is an incomplete communion of persons, whose choice to render their union infertile deliberately undermines the possibility of bringing forth life.

So contraception not only falsifies the inherent meaning of sexual intercourse by saying “I do not give myself to you completely,” it also

falsifies the sacramental nature of marriage by saying, “We will not be a sign of the complete and life-giving union of the Trinity.”

**Whether we realize it or not, contraception is a rejection of the deepest truth of our humanity: the call to live in the image and likeness of God.**

There is more that could be said, but we cannot say any less. Our belief in the Trinity must be one of the fundamental starting points for thinking about the meaning of marriage and marital intercourse. To ignore the Trinity in our discussion of marriage is to shortchange our faith.

## 6. Self-giving love: marriage, the eucharist and the cross

Jesus reveals to us that God is a communion of persons. We have just explored one way that our belief in the Trinity might impact our understanding of how marriages are called to reflect the image and likeness of God.

Jesus also reveals, in the Eucharist and on the cross, that God is self-giving love. Therefore, although we may not often think about it, we can ask and need to ask: What might the Eucharist and the cross teach us about how marriages are called to reflect the image and likeness of God?

The first thing we should point out is that holy Communion is a one flesh union of persons, and marriage involves a one flesh union of persons. The one flesh union of man and woman in marriage is meant to be a sign – limited, but real – of the one flesh union that is offered to us in the Eucharist. This is part of the reason why Pope Benedict XVI, drawing on the thought of John Paul II, could say:

*The Eucharist, as the sacrament of charity, has a particular relationship with the*



*love of man and woman united in marriage. (Sacramentum Caritatis, 27)*

Many people have probably never thought about the fact the Eucharist is a one flesh union that gives life and marital intercourse is a one flesh union that has the capacity to give life. But Pope







Benedict XVI draws on that parallel when he says:

*For in the most blessed Eucharist is contained the entire spiritual wealth of the Church, namely Christ himself...who gives life to humanity through his flesh.*

*(Sacramentum Caritatis, 16)*

Along those same lines, we can point out another important parallel. On the cross, Christ made a complete gift of his body and blood to us so that we might have life; likewise, in marriage, spouses make a complete gift of their body and blood to each other so that there might be life. The parallel may seem novel. But think about a mother,

whose gift of her body and blood to bring forth the life of her children is such a beautiful imitation of Christ. In fact, the catechism draws on this parallel when it says:

*The Church is born primarily of Christ's total self-giving for our salvation, anticipated in the institution of the Eucharist and fulfilled on the cross. (CCC, 766)*

The truth about the human body is revealed by the God who took on flesh. In the Eucharist and on the cross, Jesus makes a complete gift of himself, holding nothing back. He gives his very body and blood so that we might have life. (That's why we have a crucifix at the celebration of Mass – to

remind us that the body and blood that were sacrificed for us on the cross are the same body and blood that are presented for us to eat and drink, under the appearance of bread and wine, in holy Communion.) The Holy Father puts it this way:

*The sacrament of charity, the Holy Eucharist, is the gift that Jesus Christ makes of himself. (Sacramentum Caritatis, 1)*

By making a gift of his body, Jesus revealed the meaning of our bodies: with our bodies we can imitate Christ, making a complete gift of ourselves, holding nothing back. We need to realize that the imitation of Christ is what men and women, fathers and mothers, are called to do in marriage.

As with our reflections on the Trinity, these reflections on marriage, the Eucharist and the cross can help us to understand why the Church refuses to condone contraception. In the Eucharist and on the cross, Jesus loved the Church by making a complete gift of himself to us so that we might have life. And St. Paul declares that the one flesh union

of man and woman in marital intercourse is supposed to be a sign of Christ's love for the Church. But couples who use contraception make an incomplete gift of themselves to each other so that there might not be life.

So contraception not only falsifies the inherent meaning of sexual intercourse by saying, "I do not give myself to you completely," it also falsifies the sacramental nature of marriage by saying, "We will not be a sign of Christ's love for the Church. We will not love as Christ loved us, in the Eucharist and on the cross."

**Whether we realize it or not, contraception is a rejection of the deepest truth about marriage – its capacity to be a sign of Christ's love for the Church.**

Once again, there is more that could be said. Once again, we cannot say anything less. As with the Trinity, the Eucharist and the cross must provide fundamental starting points for thinking about the meaning of marriage and marital intercourse. To ignore the Trinity, the Eucharist or the cross in a discussion of marriage is to truncate the faith, and to limit our ability to understand the true meaning and deepest nature of marriage.

## 7. A Theology of the body: marriage and the central mysteries of the faith

By pointing out some of the basic connections between marriage and the Trinity, marriage and the Eucharist and marriage and the cross, we begin to form a "theology of the body." If we develop this theology of the body, we will be able to see more clearly how our faith in Jesus Christ, our celebration of the sacraments, and the decisions we make in everyday life can all be connected. Rather than separating faith and everyday life we can learn to integrate them. The theology of the body challenges us to not only believe the faith with our minds, but to live the faith with our bodies.

If we understand marriage in the context

of the central mysteries of the faith – the Trinity, the Eucharist and the cross – we can get a vision of what the true meaning of marital intercourse is, and what it is not.

**If we develop this theology of the body, we will be able to see more clearly how our faith in Jesus Christ, our celebration of the sacraments, and the decisions we make in everyday life can all be connected.**



## 8. What's a body to do? Responding to some practical questions

I am fully aware that what has been said so far calls many people to change their lives in a radical way. Inevitably, this challenge will raise some questions. Some of them are legitimate questions, while others are probably attempts at rationalization. But whatever their motive, the questions exist. While I cannot anticipate and answer every question that might arise, experience suggests some common misperceptions give rise to a fairly standard set of questions. So I want to respond to a few typical questions right away.

**Q. If contraception is wrong, does that mean we have to have as many children as is physically possible?**

**A.** Very simply: No. The Church does not teach that you have to have as many children as is physically possible. *Humanae Vitae* discusses this question under the heading of “Responsible Parenthood.” It teaches that there are legitimate physical, economic, psychological and social reasons why a couple may need to limit the size of their family, or delay having more children

(paragraph 10).

So the real question is not whether “family planning” is legitimate, but how it should be carried out.

This is where the Church’s teaching on Natural Family Planning comes into play. Natural Family Planning (NFP) is not “the rhythm method” of a previous generation. The rhythm method attempted to predict the time of a woman’s fertility, based on the false assumptions that each month’s cycle would be the same as the previous month’s cycle, and that all women’s cycles are the same. (The falsity of these assumptions explains why it was not a reliable method of family planning.) Today’s NFP, by contrast, involves methods of observing whether a woman is in the fertile or infertile time of her cycle, and therefore whether intercourse is likely to result in conception or not. These methods are not only moral, they are scientifically effective. They also have the following advantages: 1) Couples who use NFP rarely divorce. 2) NFP does not treat a woman’s fertility as an abnormality, to be regulated by flooding her body with chemicals. 3) NFP requires attentiveness





to and respect for a woman's body, communication about the prospects of conception, mutual discernment about whether a couple is ready to conceive and shared responsibility for putting mutually discerned priorities into action. These disciplines – attentiveness and respect, communication, mutual discernment, and shared responsibility – build stronger marriages (and may help to explain why NFP couples rarely divorce).

**Q. We believe that it would be irresponsible for us to conceive at this time. But we still want to come together in marital intercourse – in fact we need to do so in order to nurture our union. So, what can we do if contraception is wrong?**

**A.** With Natural Family Planning, a couple can still engage in marital intercourse. If you believe it would be irresponsible to conceive a child at this time, you simply avoid having intercourse during times when it is likely to result in conception, and have recourse to the infertile periods of the woman's cycle.

**Q. If a couple uses NFP – having intercourse during the infertile times of a woman's cycle, and abstaining from intercourse during the fertile times – isn't that pretty much the same thing as using contraceptives? After all, both are using deliberate means to achieve the goal of avoiding conception, and both seem to be withholding their fertility from each other.**

**The old moral adage is “the end doesn't justify the means.” That's because different means to the same end can have morally relevant differences.**

**A.** This question allows us to clarify the moral difference between NFP and contraception with greater precision.

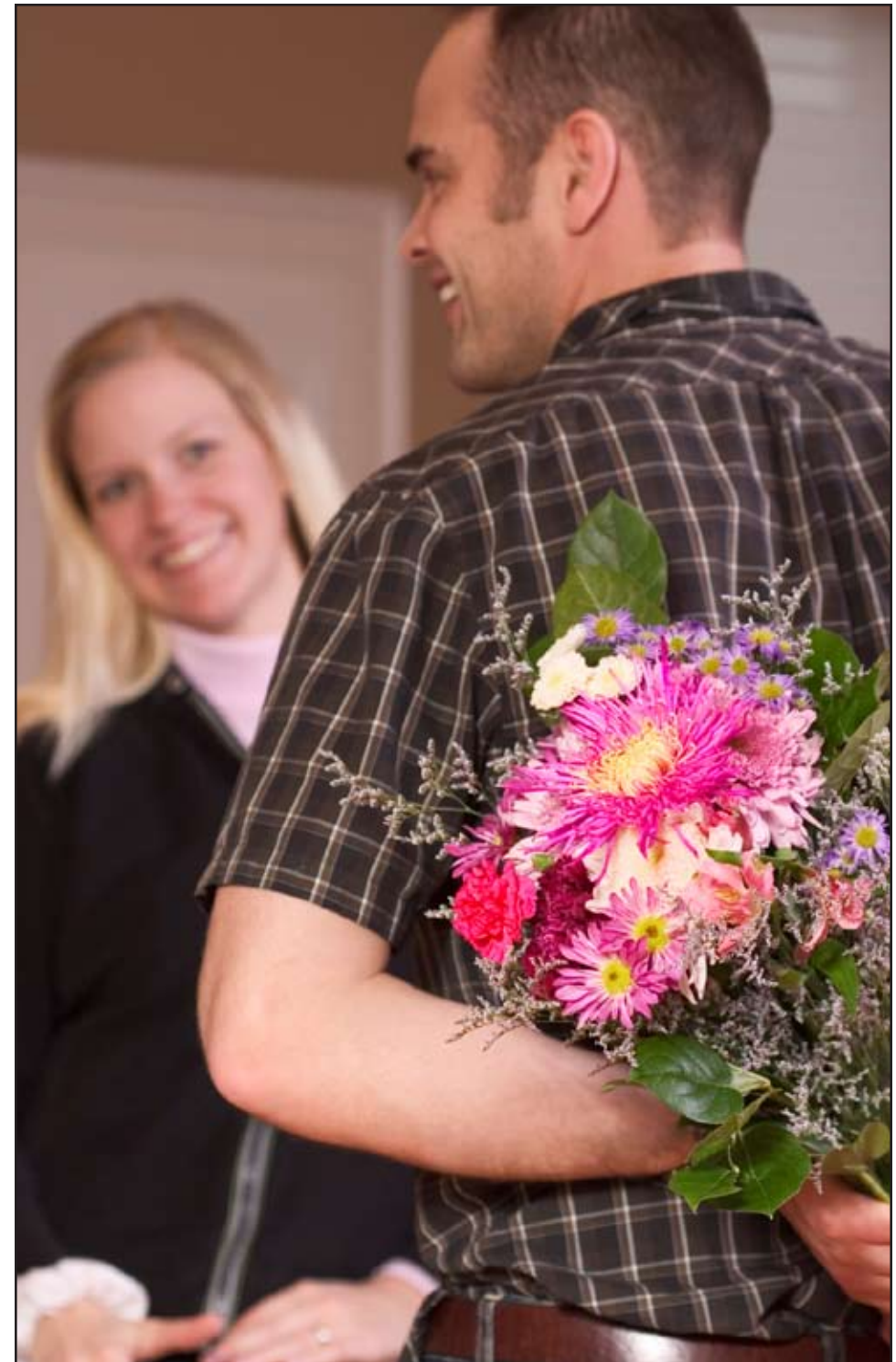
While it is true that both NFP and contraception involve deliberate action, and that both can be used to avoid pregnancy, it is also true that they are different means to that end. The old moral adage is “the end doesn't justify the means.” That's because different means to the same end can have morally relevant differences. For example, asking someone if you can borrow their car and taking the car are morally different means to the same end. Besides having a good end in mind, you have to use the right means to obtain the end.

So what is the moral difference between contraception and NFP as means of avoiding pregnancy? The idea of “body language” may give us a helpful way to understand it.

When a couple has sexual intercourse during an infertile time, they are still making a complete gift of all that they are and have. In that moment, when their bodies are saying “I give to you all that I am and have” and “I accept the gift of all that you are,” they are not holding anything back. Therefore there is no contradiction in their body language: they are not simultaneously engaging in intercourse and deliberately impeding the procreative potential of the intercourse. They are cooperating with a naturally infertile time.

When a couple abstains from intercourse during the fertile time, they are not simultaneously engaging in intercourse and deliberately acting to suppress their fertility. They are choosing not to speak the language of complete self-giving in that way and at that time. Since they are not using intercourse to say “I give myself to you completely,” there is no contradiction in their body language.

But when a couple uses contraception, the situation is different: They are deliberately acting to suppress part of what they are and have while, at the same time, their bodies are speaking a language of complete





self-giving. They know that intercourse may result in new life, and deliberately act to suppress the possibility. Their bodies are saying “I give myself completely to you, without reservation” but they are simultaneously holding something back. There is an internal contradiction in their body language.

Humanae Vitae puts the matter this way:

“Neither the Church nor her doctrine is inconsistent when she considers it lawful for married people to take advantage of the infertile period but condemns as always unlawful the use of means which directly prevent conception ... In reality, these two cases are completely different. In the former the married couple rightly use a faculty provided them by nature. In the later they obstruct the natural development of the generative process.” (16)

One final note should be added: In addition to the moral difference between NFP and contraception as a means of avoiding

pregnancy, NFP can actually help couples when they wish to conceive.

**Q. We’re open to the prospect of having children, but don’t feel that now is the right time to conceive. Isn’t it OK to be open to children in general, but to use contraceptives on occasion? As long as our marriage is open to children as a whole, does it really make much difference if this or that act of intercourse isn’t?**

**A.** If we tell the truth most of the time, does that make it OK to lie once in a while? If we are faithful to our spouse on the whole, does it make much difference if we commit adultery every now and then?

The point of these counter-questions is not to make light of the original question, but to demonstrate this principle: Individual acts are crucial in the formation of our moral character.

**Ask for God’s help, especially through the Eucharist and Penance. Through them, you will receive the grace you need to live out your marriage according to the meaning inscribed in your body, and in a way that is true to the mysteries of the faith.**



Being good in general doesn’t stop sin from being sin. As an old Chinese proverb states: “The beginning of wisdom is to call a thing by its true name.” If we want to ask for God’s healing, and for grace to overcome our weakness and grow in holiness, we must have the courage to call sin by its true name.

**Q. We haven’t been living this way ... and I’m not sure we can. It seems like it would be hard to make this change. What can we do?**

**A.** It is hard. But, by the grace of God, it is possible. In fact, if you stop to think about it, the combination of being both hard and possible is true of any virtue: getting in physical shape, learning to play a musical instrument, developing a regular prayer life. Most of the things that bring real joy to life are not easy; they’re still worth the effort.

*Humanae Vitae* contains a beautiful exhortation to married couples on this point:

“Therefore, let spouses willingly take up the labors that have been assigned to them, strengthened both by faith and by hope, which ‘do not disappoint: because the charity of God is poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who is given to us.’ (Rom. 5:5) Let them constantly pray for divine assistance. And let them especially drink of grace and charity from the eternal font of the Eucharist. If, however, they are hampered by their sins, let them not lose heart, but let them constantly flee to the mercy of God, which the sacrament of penance abundantly provides. It is by this way of life that spouses will be able to advance toward perfection in their married life ...” (25)

Ask for God’s help, especially through the Eucharist and Penance. Through them, you will receive the grace you need to live out your marriage according to the meaning inscribed in your body, and in a way that is true to the mysteries of the faith.





## 9. Conclusion

In his Letter to the Ephesians, Saint Paul declares that the one flesh union of man and woman is a “great mystery.” (Eph. 5:32) Its greatness demands that we understand and revere it as God intended. I have written these reflections on the 40th anniversary of *Humanae Vitae* in the hope that they might help us to do so.

There is a crisis in today’s culture regarding marriage and sexuality. Perhaps that crisis has something to do with the fact that when we started to rely increasingly on contraception in the 1960s and ’70s, we also began to depart from God’s plan for marriage and sexuality. The more we came to rely on contraception – even with the best of intentions – the further we departed from that plan. The further we departed from the plan, the deeper the crisis grew.

Now, 40 years later, the Christian understanding of marriage and sexuality is fighting for its life in a culture of death.

Perhaps one of the major reasons that the vast majority of Catholics do not follow the teaching of *Humanae Vitae* is that, sometimes through no fault of their own, they simply never saw what contraception has to do with the central mysteries of the faith. “Can’t I just disagree with this one little teaching?” is the oft-repeated question. People don’t see that “this one little teaching” is like the thread that sticks out of your sweater: When you start to pull on it, it turns out to be connected to everything else, and the whole sweater begins to unravel. I hope that the reflections offered above might help more people come to understand what marriage and sexuality have to do with the central elements of the Catholic faith.

My primary purpose in writing has been pastoral. If the soul and the body are as intimately connected as our everyday experience demonstrates, then actions of the

body that are contrary to the faith – even if they are well intended – can simultaneously lead souls away from the faith. I believe that has happened, and continues to happen, with the use of contraception. It slowly but surely undermines the ability of married couples to live and grow in the image and likeness of the God who is a communion of persons, and to imitate the complete self-giving of Jesus in the Eucharist and on the cross.

I do not say this to cast blame on anyone. We are all children of our culture in various ways, and contraception is part of the “native language” of our culture. I have no doubt that many have used contraception without intending harm. I do not doubt that many have used it without intending to act contrary to the faith. But my goal has been to show how harm can come even if we do not intend it, how we can contradict our deepest convictions without ever meaning to.

Christ’s call is to fidelity and integrity in our faith and action. My brothers and sisters in Christ, I believe it is time to acquire a counter-cultural language – a sacramental language – when it comes to sexual morality.

Contraception is one of the cornerstones of the culture of death. But Jesus Christ is the victor over death, and he calls us to build a culture of life. If we want to help build a culture of life, then we are going to need to write a new cultural “constitution.” Placing the issues of marriage, sexuality and contraception squarely in the context of the Trinity, the Eucharist and the cross is one way that Catholics can contribute to the writing of that cultural constitution. And each of us can build up a culture of life by pondering these connections, and by choosing actions that speak the deepest truth about humanity and marriage with our bodies.

## Further Resources

### Humanae Vitae is available at:

The Vatican Web site: [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va)

The document is available, with a study guide, at the Priests for Life Web site: [www.priestsforlife.org](http://www.priestsforlife.org)

### For further information on Natural Family Planning contact:

- John and Julia Hoving  
Couple-to-Couple League NFP teaching couple  
[northmarsh@rocketmail.com](mailto:northmarsh@rocketmail.com)
- Pope Paul VI Institute  
Creighton Model Fertility System & Fertility Disorders  
[www.popepaulvi.com](http://www.popepaulvi.com)
- Mary Ann Cherry  
Coordinator of Marriage and Family Ministry,  
Diocese of Saginaw  
989.797.6660  
[mcherry@dioceseofsaginaw.org](mailto:mcherry@dioceseofsaginaw.org)

## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> “[M]an is a being made up of body and soul. Man is truly himself when his body and soul are intimately united; the challenge of eros can be said to be truly overcome when this unification is achieved... it is neither the spirit alone nor the body alone that loves: it is man, the person, a unified creature composed of body and soul, who loves. Only when both dimensions are truly united, does man attain his full stature. Only thus is love – eros – able to mature and attain its authentic grandeur.” (Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, 5)

<sup>2</sup> Available at: [www.saginaw.org](http://www.saginaw.org). Also available on the Vatican Web site at: [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/paul\\_vi/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_enc\\_25071968\\_humanae-vitae\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_25071968_humanae-vitae_en.html) A study guide for reading and reflecting on *Humanae Vitae* can be found at: <http://www.priestsforlife.org/contraception/humanae-vitae-study-guide.htm>

<sup>3</sup> Someone may legitimately wonder: When a couple, using Natural Family Planning, has sex during the infertile time, or abstains from sex during the fertile time, are they not also deliberately withholding their fertility? This is a good question, and it will be answered below, under the heading “What’s a body to Do?”

<sup>4</sup> “It was not by chance that Jesus, in speaking of human love, alluded to what God created at

### For further information on the Church’s teaching on marriage:

- *Good News about Sex and Marriage*.  
|Christopher West.  
(An easy-to-read, question-and-answer book about the Church’s teaching on marriage.)

### On the Church’s teaching on contraception:

- *Contraception: Why Not?* Janet Smith, PhD.  
(A presentation, available in DVD, CD, and MP3 format, on how and why contraception failed to deliver on the promises of the sexual revolution.)

### On the *Theology of the Body*:

- *Theology of the Body for Beginners*.  
Christopher West.  
(John Paul II’s *Theology of the Body*, translated into language and examples that everyone can understand.)

the beginning of the Creation (cf. Mt 19: 4-6). His teaching refers to a free act with which the Creator not only meant to express the riches of his love which is open, giving itself to all, but he also wanted to impress upon it a paradigm in accordance with which humanity’s action must be declined. In the fruitfulness of conjugal love, the man and the woman share in the Father’s creative act and make it clear that at the origin of their spousal life they pronounce a genuine ‘yes’ which is truly lived in reciprocity, remaining ever open to life. This word of the Lord, with its profound truth, endures unchanged and cannot be abolished by the different theories that have succeeded one another in the course of the years.” (Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to Participants in the International Congress Organized by the Pontifical Lateran University on the 40th Anniversary of the Encyclical *Humanae Vitae*. May 10, 2008.)

<sup>5</sup> For example, see John Paul II: “If... we want to retrieve also from the account of the Yahwist text the concept of ‘image of God,’ we can deduce that man became the image of God not only through his own humanity, but also through the communion of persons, which man and woman form from the very beginning. The function of the image is that of mirroring the one who is the model, of reproducing its own prototype. Man becomes

an image of God not so much in the moment of solitude as in the moment of communion. He is, in fact, ‘from the beginning’ not only an image in which the solitude of one Person, who rules the world, mirrors itself, but also and essentially the image of an inscrutable divine communion of Persons. In this way, the second account could also prepare for understanding the Trinitarian concept of the ‘image of God,’ even if ‘image’ appears only in the first account.” (*Theology of the Body*, 9.3) For development of this theme at greater length, see Marc Cardinal Ouellet’s *Divine Likeness: Toward a Trinitarian Anthropology of the Family*, especially chapter 1. <sup>6</sup> “In the mystery of creation – on the basis of the original and constitutive “solitude” of his being – man has been endowed with a deep unity between what is, humanly and through the body, male in him and what is, equally humanly and through the body, female in him. On all this, right from the beginning, the blessing of fruitfulness descended, linked with human procreation.” (*Theology of the Body*, 9.3)

<sup>7</sup> “God created man in his own image and likeness: calling him to existence through love, he called him at the same time for love. God is love and in himself he lives a mystery of personal loving communion. Creating the human race in his own image and continually keeping it in being, God inscribed in the humanity of man and woman the vocation, and thus the capacity and responsibility, of love and communion.” (John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 11)

<sup>8</sup> As Benedict XVI points out in *Deus Caritas Est*, the relationship between who God is and what marriage is meant to be is embedded in the Old Testament: “Corresponding to the image of a monotheistic God is monogamous marriage. Marriage based on exclusive and definitive love becomes the icon of the relationship between God and his people and vice-versa. God’s way of loving becomes the measure of human love.” (11) To ask about the Eucharist, the cross and marriage is simply to extend this same principle into the New Testament.

<sup>9</sup> See Pope Benedict XVI’s Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis*: “The Eucharist, as the sacrament of charity, has a particular relationship with the love of man and woman united in marriage. A deeper understanding of this relationship is needed at the present time. Pope John Paul II frequently spoke of the nuptial character of the Eucharist and its special relationship with the sacrament of Matrimony: “The Eucharist is the sacrament of our

redemption. It is the sacrament of the Bridegroom and of the Bride.” Moreover, “the entire Christian life bears the mark of the spousal love of Christ and the Church. Already Baptism, the entry into the People of God, is a nuptial mystery; it is so to speak the nuptial bath which precedes the wedding feast, the Eucharist.” The Eucharist inexhaustibly strengthens the indissoluble unity and love of every Christian marriage. By the power of the sacrament, the marriage bond is intrinsically linked to the eucharistic unity of Christ the Bridegroom and his Bride, the Church (cf. Eph 5:31-32). The mutual consent that husband and wife exchange in Christ, which establishes them as a community of life and love, also has a eucharistic dimension. Indeed, in the theology of Saint Paul, conjugal love is a sacramental sign of Christ’s love for his Church, a love culminating in the cross, the expression of his “marriage” with humanity and at the same time the origin and heart of the Eucharist.” (#27) For development of this theme at greater length, see chapter 8 of Marc Cardinal Ouellet’s *Divine Likeness: Toward a Trinitarian Anthropology of the Family*.

<sup>10</sup> See John 6: 51: “The bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world.” See also *Dues Caritas Est*, in which Benedict XVI notes that, through the Eucharist, “The imagery of marriage between God and Israel is now realized in a way previously inconceivable... now it becomes union with God through sharing in Jesus’ self-gift, sharing in his body and blood.” (13)

<sup>11</sup> Again there is a crucial, if subtle, distinction between Natural Family Planning and contraception. The distinction will be treated in greater detail below.

<sup>12</sup> The scientific effectiveness for different methods of family planning are reported in two statistical measures: method effectiveness records a method’s theoretical reliability when used under ideal conditions, while use effectiveness records its actual reliability under normal use. The method and use effectiveness statistics for the “Creighton Model Fertility Care System” of NFP – the method on which the most rigorous scientific testing has been done – are reported at <http://www.creightonmodel.com/effectiveness.htm>. A method effectiveness of 98.7-99.8% and a use effectiveness of 94.6-97.9% easily make it a statistical match for contraceptive pills.

<sup>13</sup> For this quotation, I have used Janet Smith’s “25th Anniversary Commemorative Edition” translation.



# Body and Soul



**faith** *Saginaw*

5800 Weiss St.  
Saginaw, MI 48603-2799

---

**online:** [www.saginaw.org](http://www.saginaw.org)  
[www.FAITHsaginaw.com](http://www.FAITHsaginaw.com)