The Cycle of Life

There is no question that the Church's teaching on contraception is widely rejected by many today - even by many within the Church.

Before going any further, let's take a moment to talk about sex. Many people think that the Church views sex as dirty and unclean. Yes people have to do it, but in reality this is animalistic, less than human, somehow demeaning to our true dignity. I get the feeling that many people think that the Church secretly believes that everyone should be celibate, just like everybody should spend all day in Church. If the Church could, she would impose that on everybody, because sex is gross, sinful, and dirty...and this is the real reason why the Church forces her priests to be celibate, because sex and holiness just don't mix. Sex is really for second class citizens, for those who can't control themselves, right?

Nothing could be further from the truth:

1. God created sex, He intended for married couples to engage in it and to enjoy it.
2. Whatever God created is good. We see this from the book of Genesis. In the creation narrative, after the end of “the sixth day”, we read the following…“God looked at everything he had made, and found it very good.”
3. God is good, what God creates is good. God created man, male and female he created him. God created the male and female in such a way that they would have sex in order to reproduce. God also attached great pleasure to sex. Therefore, sex is good. Therefore, the pleasure he attached to it is good.

Now I am a man so this comes from a man's perspective, but I would have to say that sex is not only good, sex is awesome, really and totally awesome. If there is a man in this room who disagrees with that last statement I would like to meet with you...and then have you committed to a mental institution. If a man says that sex is not awesome then he is lying, crazy, or just stupid. Sex is awesome, period. And *that* is why the Church asks her priests and members of religious orders to give up sex...not because sex is bad, but because sex is good. Sex is very good. And that is really the meaning of sacrifice. We priests don't sacrifice what is bad, but what is good. If a man is disgusted by sex, thinks that it is gross, or is somehow adverse to it, then that man has no business being a celibate priest, because than that man is no longer living a life of sacrifice, and that is what the priesthood is all about.

We men need women to teach us how to love, that is true for just about everyone. A man learns how to love from his wife. In addition, in general, women are givers, while men are takers. Men will give, but they need to have a promise of a reward. If a woman wants her husband to give in a relationship, he'll do it, but he needs to know that there is a reward coming to him, and I think we all know what that reward is.

Sex is very powerful...for you ladies, it is the key to a man's heart. Men have a natural desire for it, they are wired for it, and let's face it, women desire it as well. God created us with that desire built in, it's as natural as the sky being blue and the grass being green, and married couples are meant to enjoy it.

Now as an aside, just because we priests don't have sex, we are called like everyone to love intimately and be loved intimately. We enjoy that with God directly, and I can tell you that there is no intimacy like divine intimacy. And where do we priests learn to love intimately...from women religious saints. I personally learned from St. Faustina, a 20th century polish nun. Her diary is filled with beautiful poetry and descriptions of divine union and what it really means to love souls and desire their salvation. Here is an excerpt from her diary, when Our Lord appears to St. Faustina and tells her:

***There is but one price at which souls are bought, and that is suffering united to my suffering on the cross. Pure love understands these words; carnal love will never understand these words (324).***

That passage is pretty much the reason why I am a priest. And we priests will give in our relationship with God, we will even give up sex, but we need the promise of a reward. Once again, St. Faustina to the rescue:

In the evening, I just about got into bed, and I fell asleep immediately. Though I fell asleep quickly, I was awakened even more quickly. A little child came and woke me up...The child was beautiful beyond words and resembled the child Jesus, and He said to me, **Look at the sky.** And when I looked at the sky I saw the stars and the moon shining. Then the child asked me, **Do you see this moon and these** stars? When I said yes, he spoke these words to me. **These stars are the souls of faithful Christians, and the moon is the soul of religious. Do you see how great the difference is between the light of the moon and the light of the stars? Such is the difference in heaven between the soul of a religious and the soul of a faithful Christian** *(424).*

The soul of a religious...what is that? That is the soul of someone who has given up everything to follow Christ (A Dominican friar, Franciscan friar, Jesuit brother, priest…I would think the soul of a diocesan priest could also be added here). We priests will sacrifice big things, like marriage and family, but we need the promise of a reward, a big reward. Now hopefully we will all shine like the stars in heaven. There is a reference to this in Scripture. In the book of Revelation, we read, “Night will be no more, nor will they need light from lamp or sun, for the Lord God shall give them light, and they shall reign forever and ever.” Now to me that is very beautiful. And I decided a long time ago…I don't care what it costs me, I don't care what I have to suffer, sacrifice, or undergo...because I want the moon, and I'm going to get it.

Now let's get back to the topic at hand, let's get back to our discussion on sex. Married men will sacrifice in marriage, but most will have to know that eventually sex is coming. They need that reward. Now this is very uncomfortable (more for me as a celibate priest that for you), but let's be honest, what makes for great sex? I think many people would say great sex happens when husband and wife are really into it...fully engaged, when they can let go of whatever may be on their mind and be fully focused on each other. Now this is easy for a man. Men's brains are very specialized. When they are at work they have their work box, when they are doing chores they have their chores box, when they come home from work and turn on the television they have their nothing box, and let there be no doubt, when they are having sex they are very much focused on their sex box. This is harder for women, their brains aren't so specialized. Women can be thinking about 10 things at once. So while a woman is engaging in sex, she might also be thinking about what clothes to lay out for the kids tomorrow, what she will make for dinner, when the next gas bill is due, and so on. It is hard for a woman to focus on just one thing. While their are exceptions, they just don't think that way normally. But if they can relax and let go of those other things, if they can focus on what they are doing and let go of their inhibitions, I think most people would say that is going to make for great sex.

If that is the case, most people would naturally say that contraception could only be a good thing, because now a woman doesn't have to worry about getting pregnant. Therefore, contraception equals better sex. I'm not so sure about that. The Church wants her married couples to have great sex, sex that not only feels great but that leads to genuine happiness among her couples. But She will argue that natural sex will accomplish that much better than contraceptive sex.

Let’s take a moment to examine human nature. Nobody wants to be lonely. We have a natural desire to love intimately and be loved intimately. For most people, sex fulfills this function. Although it is not the only way to achieve intimacy (and not necessarily the best way), it is the normal way for most people. Now let’s take a moment to consider the nature of sin.

When we discover something that is legitimately good, like sex, many times we want to use that thing on our terms, we want that thing to conform to us, not us to it.

This goes back to the story of Adam and Eve and the temptation to eat from the knowledge of good and evil. So what is going on there? First, the tempter seeks to put doubt in their minds about God's plan or commandment. He wants them to be suspicious. So he tells them, “[If you eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil], you certainly will not die. God knows well that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like gods, who know good and evil.”

The tempter is insinuating that there is some secret knowledge that God wants to keep from them, a better path that He will not show you. God is jealous, he does not want you to become like Him, he wants to keep you down, to make your life miserable. So there is temptation to take the given-ness of creation and tailor it to our needs, to be like gods ourselves, where moral right and wrong no longer limit us, but where our will, what we want, that is what determines what we shall do. I want to say that again, because it is crucial, what matters here is what I want. I want what I want, and it is ultimately morally justified because I want it. That pretty much describes modern man.

Let’s look at the Church’s teaching on sex. The Church says that sex is meant for two aims or ends, (1) procreation and (2) the union or good of the spouses. In other words, babies and bonding. The Church argues that severing these two aims of sexual intercourse will have disastrous effects not only on couples but also on our society. Now, the Church also teaches that artificial forms of contraception are immoral because these methods sever the first end (babies) from the second end (bonding). That is a pretty tough teaching. It’s rational, but if you try to make that argument to a married couple that is contracepting, they just kind of look at you funny. If they are less socially inhibited, they’ll tear right into you and tell you to stay out of their private lives. They will do almost anything to reject this teaching. Even if you go the fire and brimstone route (which I personally don’t recommend), they’ll simply deny the existence of hell and the evil one. That really is not terribly surprising. Sex is not only good, sex is awesome, human beings like it a lot. They want to control it, they want to use it and experience intense pleasure from it on their terms. Put simply, for many folks contraceptive sex is right because that’s what they want. They want the bonding without the babies, and therefore it must be right.

Again, human beings want to love intimately and be loved intimately. But we think we know a better way...God's plan for married sex is too burdensome, if we can eliminate that first aim, i.e., the possibility of a new child, then the second element, the good of the spouses will necessarily be better. That is totally plausible...but when we look at what has happened in our culture I am not so sure. I think the Church is onto something here.

**Teens and Sex**

If contraceptive sex can make for better sex within marriage by eliminating the fear of getting pregnant, it can do that before marriage as well, or so the argument goes. Many will say that since our kids can't control themselves anyway, this will free them up to do what they want, to be sexually active without consequences, i.e., less unwed pregnancies.

In 2003, 62% of 12th graders had had sexual intercourse, with a much higher percentage experimenting in foreplay.[[1]](#footnote-1) This number sounds right. I'm a chaplain at a local Catholic high school, and yes, there is a lot of sexual activity going on. I would argue that contraceptive sex leads to that...If we can enjoy sex without consequences, why would anybody wait until marriage. But we know there are consequences:

1. 50 years ago there were only 2 sexually transmitted diseases, syphilis and gonorrhea, now there are 35 to 50.
2. There are three million new cases of Chlamydia every year, a major cause of infertility.
3. HPV - human papillomavirus - between 5.5 and 6 million new cases every year. The HPV is a major cause of cervical cancer.
4. In 1960, 3% of white babies were born out of wedlock and 22% of black babies were born out of wedlock. In the U.S., 6% of all babies were born out of wedlock. In 1960 it was very difficult to get a contraceptive. Kids really had to go out of their way. Now there are vending machines on many college campuses where they can easily acquire them, or they can go to the local drugstore down the street. This must be good...less unwanted pregnancies right?
5. In 2003, about 24% of white babies were born out of wedlock, 68% of black babies were born our of wedlock, and 34% of all babies born in the U.S. were born out of wedlock.

Greater access to artificial forms of contraception have increased the number of unwed pregnancies, not decreased them.

**Poverty** - most of those who live in poverty in the United States are single mothers with children. There might be jobs available, but a woman with a child at home can't get the education she needs to qualify her for the jobs that exist. Many times she has to live on welfare to pay for the child…she has no choice.

1. More stats...About 68% of children that live with a never-married parent live in poverty; 42% of those living with a parent who is separated live in poverty, about 38% of those living with parents who are cohabiting live in poverty, only 12% of children living with parents who are in their first marriage are living in poverty (probably because they are in early years of marriage and in time will climb out of that).
2. The greater access to contraception, the greater the temptation is to engage is sex outside of marriage (why not?), and thus a greater number of unwanted pregnancies, a greater number of unwed mothers with children, and so poverty goes up.

**Abortion**

We all want there to be less abortions. Well this is great, if the fear of pregnancy is diminished, if the possibility of getting pregnant is diminished, abortions will decline. The numbers do not bear this out.

1. 63% of women who are getting abortions have never been married
2. 11% are divorced
3. 6% are separated
4. 1% are widowed
5. 81% of those having abortions are not living in the married state.
6. **50% of women who go to abortion clinics claim that they were using a contraceptive when they got pregnant (obviously there must have been a contraceptive failure)**
7. **The other 50% claim that they were using contraception in the past (girl doesn't like the pill, goes off it, their boyfriend comes around, they have sex, and there you go).**

Contraception will prompt people to be more sexually active, not less so. There will be pregnancies, and so abortions will occur. So abortion just becomes an emergency form of contraception.

Supreme Court, *Planned* *Parenthood vs. Casey*

*"For two decades of economic and social developments, people have organized intimate relationships and made choices that define their views of themselves and their places in society in reliance on the availability of abortion in the event that contraception should fail."*

***The real problem: Not that contraception has failed, but that the women is having sexual intercourse with someone whom she would never have a child with. Contraception makes this scenario possible and likely.***

**Chemical Contraceptives are abortifacients:**

The pill, Norplant, Depo-Provera, and the patch

These drugs produce forms of hormones to trick the female body to think that she is pregnant. Women don't ovulate when they are pregnant. But there is a war inside the body of a woman...a healthy woman wants to ovulate...and sometimes a woman's natural hormones win out.

What happens then is that an egg might indeed be fertilized by the semen, and we have a new embryo, a new human being. That embryo may try to implant itself on the mother's uterine wall but cannot...she doesn't have the full production of hormones that will allow that implantation to occur, so the new human being dies because the drug prevents the embryo to nest in uterine wall.

**Contraception leads to sex outside of marriage, this does damage to our young people.**

When I think about the temptations that our young men and women face in high school, I am amazed how they survive.

1. I certainly don't condone teenagers having one-night stands...Should this happen I hope they will come to the sacrament of confession ASAP. However, I understand how this can happen. Boy and girl see one another during the week, they exchange glances of interest, they like what they see. On the weekend they see each other at a party, get intoxicated, and then have sex. This is pretty common today.
2. However, it boggles my mind how a teenage boy and teenage girl can really get to know each other, enjoy each other, really care for each other, and then have sex with each other. That creates quite a bond between the two of them. The only problem is that while the intimate connection between them might be great, they usually break up eventually. I find that they either break up at graduation or if they really like each other they stick it out but will break up after their 1st year of college...at the latest. And when it happens, it is heartbreaking...it really hurts. To be sexually intimate with someone, your body is saying that you are married to somebody. To break up with someone after having that kind of connection...now your body is saying that you are divorced. Imagine being 18 and having to go through a divorce. And so what happens, the young woman hurts so bad she often will run into another sexual relationship, as does the young man. Anyway, by the time they are 25 or 26, they have effectively been married and divorced 3 or 4 times. Would you want to marry somebody who has been married and divorced 3 or 4 times? Do you wonder why the divorce rate is so high? These kids are damaged goods...and contraception made that possibility of sex without pregnancy, it gave them access to sex before marriage and in the end really hurt them.

**Cohabitation** - Some might think that contraception is great because couples can cohabit, have sex on a regular basis (w/o worrying about kids), save money (why would you pay for 2 rents when a couple spends all their time together anyway), and really have a trial marriage.

This makes a lot of sense actually. Who would buy a car without test-driving it first. But the statistics show otherwise...about 65% of people who cohabitate before marriage divorce. That always shocked me and I could never understand why.

**How does cohabitation lead to an increase in divorce rates?**

Here’s what happens in cohabitation:

* Many young people who enter a serious relationship haven’t really made a determination of compatibility. They often like how the other looks, they think about how great it would be to have sex with that person.
* And then lo and behold, they have sex, it’s awesome, better than they imagined, and they get addicted to that.
* Then they begin to think, we spend all our time together, why should we pay rent for two places and pay two electric bills, cable bills, etc. So they move in with each other.
* When they move in with one another the passion is awesome. They don’t want it to end. So they stop having important discussions, they don’t talk about things that are difficult. They don’t want to rock the boat and risk a separation. The sex is just too good.
* Also, When you live with someone it can be very awkward to move out. Moving out means that somebody has to find a new apartment. It is embarrassing and costly.
* What happens is they wait until after marriage to have these conversations, and when they do they realize maybe they are not as compatible as they thought. In addition, the sex is becoming less passionate, the mutual pleasure isn’t what it once was.
* So maybe there is a disagreement about kids or the practice of religion. Yikes, this can end a marriage pretty quickly.
* In our culture people have sex before marriage. The sex is great, they like it, they like it a lot, then they move in with each other because they want to have sex whenever they want, and then they get to know each other. This is backwards:
* Normally you would want to get to know someone, and then you fall in love with the person, and then you get married and have sex. Awesome.

So you can see that cohabitation really reverses things. It can do real damage to the long-term health of a relationship. I think contraception causes this.

**Lets talk about contraceptive sex within marriage.**

* It could very easily be argued that contraception leads to a greater chance of divorce.

Statistics:

1. At the turn of the century the divorce rate was under 10% in the United States;
2. In the 1960’s 1 in 4 marriages ended in divorce (contraceptive use had gone up over the course of the century)
3. In the 1970’s 1 out of 2 marriages ended in divorce (that is where it has stayed).

Why did that happen? That’s a pretty big jump.

* It doesn’t take a genius here. If 80% of women are using contraception, that takes away the risk of having a child, and it makes a lot of men and women think they can have sex with partners other than their spouse.
* Also, many people had multiple partners before marriage, why stop after marriage?
* If sex was no big deal when they were single, why would it be a big deal after marriage? If sex was just something you did for fun before marriage, then after marriage you don’t just suddenly change how you view sex. Sex doesn’t all of a sudden become any more meaningful than it was before. Making that kind of change will be very difficult. And actually, if one determines how good or meaningful an action is based on the amount of pleasure they derive from it, that person will many times find sex less meaningful.

**Physical and Psychological Side Effects:**

We said before that many will argue that contraceptive sex is better sex because it removes the worry about getting pregnant. However, there are other side effects that I think negate this positive.

The common side effects of the chemical contraceptives are: increased irritability, increased propensity to depression, weight gain, and a reduced sex drive.

1. **Dr. Ellen Grant**, author of book *The Bitter Pill*, a doctor in London in the 1950’s who prescribed the pill to her patients. She was worried when she saw that her patients came in with migraines, high blood pressure, ovarian cysts, and other problems. This bothered her because she wanted to make her patients’ lives better, not worse, so she stopped prescribing the pill. When she began to look at the early experimentations with the pill, she found that in the female study group three women died. There was also a male study group. Here there were reports that one male had a slight shrinkage of his testicles. Thus all testing was stopped. This tells us that researchers had a very low opinion of women…they will take drugs and do things to their bodies men won’t do to theirs.
2. The contraceptive patch was released in 2002. The patch in placed on a women’s abdomen so she can absorb chemical contraceptives into her body. There was a report released in September 2004 that stated that 17 women between the ages of 17 and 30 had died from the patch, as well as 21 additional life-threatening conditions…heart attacks, blood clots, and strokes.
3. **Lionel Tiger**, an anthropologist who studies animal behavior to learn about human behavior, thinks that women might be dressing so immodestly because they are not attracting men by their fertility (because they are not have fertile cycles).
4. **Lionel Tiger**…a study involving tee shirts. The study involved 2 groups of females, one contracepting, the other not. There were also 2 groups of men who had been rated for their evolutionary desirability. One group was healthy, aggressive, responsible, the other group were kind of losers, couldn’t hold a job, and so on. At the end of the day women smelled the tee shirts of these groups of men. The non-contracepting females chose the evolutionary desirable males, the contracepting women chose the others.
5. **Dr. Goldstein**, former director of the Institute for Sexual Medicine at Boston University, Massachusetts. Women using chemical contraceptives are not producing as much testosterone as when they are not contracepting…testosterone is the source of sex drive in women, and therefore their sex drive is reduced

**According to the article:**

1. Women on the pill were found to produce a chemical that wiped out testosterone, and the levels of that chemical were 7 times higher than those who never took the pill;
2. Those not on the pill but who had used it in the past…they had level of that same chemical four times higher than those who never used the pill
3. Blurb from **Elle**, a woman’s fashion magazine, “For years Prozac and the pill have given women emotional stability and sexual freedom, but new research suggests that these drugs can negatively affect everything from our sex drive to our choice of a mate.” The article reports that these contraceptives and antidepressants reduce a woman’s sex drive and change their perception of males.
4. These women are on antidepressants because one of the effects of the pill is depression. But antidepressants also reduce a woman’s sex drive.
5. They also discovered that when women go off the pill, they are no longer interested in the man they are with.
6. **Video *The Divorce Pill*** on nbc10.com…women coming off the pill had a higher sex drive then when they were on the pill, but they are no longer interested in the man they are with.
7. So here is what is happening…these women come off the pill because they want to have a baby, and then they have concerns about the suitability of this man as a suitable parent.
8. One article reports that female chemical messengers, pheromones, may help dupe men into thinking that plain women are more attractive and beautiful women are less attractive than they actually are.

a. in this study, men were shown pictures of very beautiful super models and indeed, found them to be very attractive. Then they were placed in a room with something (a cloth or sponge) soaked in fertile female hormones and shown pictures of average looking females. The men found these women more attractive that the supermodels.

**Overpopulation**

OK it is totally rational to worry about overpopulation. Our kids learn from a real early age that overpopulation is really a huge problem in the world. The message they take away from that is that having kids is not something they want to do. Again, given the information that is out there it is rational to be concerned about this. However, there are reasons to doubt these claims.

**Statistics:**

* Around 1750 there were about ½ billion people on earth
* In 1950 there were 2 billion people on earth.

It took 200 years for the world’s population to quadruple.

* Between 1950 and 2000 the world’s population tripled from 2 to 6 billion.

It only took 50 years for the world’s population to triple. That is scary. Population control people seem to think that the world’s population will triple every fifty years. This is false:

* This means there should be 18 billion people by 2050, but UN data says it will be 9 or 9.5 billion.
* If 18 billion by 2050, then it should be 54 billion people by 2100. But UN data says there will be slightly more than 10 billion by then.
* If 54 billion by 2100, there should be 162 billion people by 2150, but UN data says there will only be a little over 10 billion by 2150

1. Why did the world’s population triple between 1950 and 2000?

* Better health care – better hygiene, vaccines, antibiotics, so fewer infants died and more people lived longer. In Pakistan, the average lifespan doubled during this period.
* It was not because people were having too many babies, it’s just that the babies lived longer. Actually, fertility rates have been falling for decades.

1. Why does the world population virtually level off.

* In more developed countries population has been leveling off and even declining.
* Japan is not reproducing itself – they sell more adult diapers than baby diapers.
* Japan is the future for most countries…they had no baby boom generation, so they were the first to fall off the demographic cliff. That’s why their stock market crashed in the early 90’s and will never recover.
* By 2050, Italy will go from 57 million people to 41 million people, losing 16 million people or about a quarter of their population
* In many places we have an aging population. That may sound great for younger people, but it isn’t. When there are too many old people and not enough young people, bad things happen. Basically, the social welfare state will fail, because younger folks simply can’t finance the older generations. There aren’t enough of them. The Democratic solution of tax and spend doesn’t work because there are less people to tax. The Republican solution to lower taxes so big earners will spend more won’t work because there will be less people to spend more, thus undercutting the trickle down effect.
* **But why does the world’s population seem to be leveling off?**
* As a country industrializes, it needs a more educated populace, so people stay in school longer. When people stay in school longer and wait until later to get married, they more often than not have less children.

1. In agricultural cultures, girls marry at 14, 16, 18 (I’m not promoting that), they start having kids earlier and often have more kids because they have more time (and more eggs) before menopause kicks in.
2. In the US the average age of marriage is 27. Most women don’t have kids until they are 30, and they are less fertile by then. Also, many who live in urban areas want less kids because they live in apartments, not mansions. They want their kids to go to college and the exorbitant expense leads them to have less kids.

***Humanae Vitae*** – **4 Predictions:**

*Humanae Vitae* is Pope Paul VI’s encyclical which upheld the Church’s traditional teaching about the immorality of artificial forms of contraception. In his encyclical, the Holy Father said that 4 things would happen if contraception became widely available. Granted, this was written in 1968.

1. ***There would be a general lowering of morality.***

* I wasn’t alive back then but what were the popular television shows in 1968? The Brady Bunch. Today we have The Family Guy and the Bachelor.
* With television, the internet, and movies we have to remember, what we see affects our attitudes and that effects our behavior. (A man who views pornography will think of woman as sexual objects and this will lead to sexual activity with them). I am at a high school with 1200 kids. They are genuinely good people, but they are drones of the culture they live in. You can hear it in their language and you can see it in how they dress. To them the Catholic Church is crazy, and traditional values are crazy.
* Does anyone seriously think the Pope was wrong?

1. ***There would be less respect for women.*** Women are now valued for their physical characteristics, pornography is everywhere, soft-core and hard-core pornography.
2. ***There would be coercive control by governments over sexuality*** (UN population control…they will only provide aid to third world countries on the condition that they accept and distribute contraception / the 1 child policy in China (117 unmarried males for every 100 unmarried females…bad things happen when you force people to be celibate) / Even the HHS mandate here in the United States…certain religious organizations must now provide birth control in their health plan to employees.
3. ***We would start treating our bodies like machines***…test tube babies with designer genes, surrogate motherhood, in vitro fertilization. Artificial Contraception tries to have the bonding without the babies, another consequence is the babies without the bonding.

**Conscience:**

Humanae Vitae was not well-received. Many theologians, priests told the people they were free to follow their conscience and could reject this teaching. There is something wrong with that statement.

It is true that Catholics are obliged to always follow their conscience. However, the conscience should be formed by what the Catholic Church teaches.

Conscience is not a formed opinion. The conscience is that inner sanctuary where a person tries to figure out what God believes to be good and what God believes to be evil. A judgment of conscience is not what an individual judges to be good/evil, but what God judges to be good/evil.

How do we know what God thinks? As Catholics we look to the Church, because it is our belief that the Church is guided by God, by the Holy Spirit. If the Church is wrong on something as important as artificial contraception, I would personally have a hard time believing that she is the real Church, because that would mean that the Holy Spirit (i.e., God) really doesn’t guide the Church. I know people feel differently, but a Church not guided by the Holy Spirit is a church that I have no interest is being a part of. So if the Church is really wrong here…do you know what that means? That means it’s time for me to find a wife.

**Natural Family Planning (NFP)**

Let’s talk a little bit about Natural Family Planning. The Church would say that if we have a legitimate reason, then there is nothing wrong with spacing out births. Not everybody can have 12 kids. Some married couples just aren’t meant to do that. There are some things about NFP that I want to point out:

* This is not the old rhythm method, that doesn’t work.
* Any woman can use NFP no matter how irregular her cycles
* Relatively speaking, women are infertile creatures
* Women have a limited number of eggs, maybe a couple hundred thousand, some say a million.
* Men are extremely fertile in comparison – they have 4 to seven million sperm in any ejaculate.
* Woman ripen and release one egg a month. The egg lives in the body for 24 hours, it can be fertilized for only 12 of those 24 hours, so there is only a 12 hour window to get pregnant.

I can’t believe as a priest I’d ever be talking about a woman’s cycle, but here goes:

1. If it’s the beginning of the month and a woman did not conceive the previous month, she begins with a few days of bleeding;
2. She built up an endometrium that was prepared to receive a little fertilized egg, an ovum, a little human being.
3. If no human being – she expels the endometrium.
4. Then there are dry days – that can last for several day (no bleeding and no fertile mucus).
5. Her body is resting from the days of bleeding and she needs to restore herself;
6. Her body is also preparing for the next cycle of ovulation – she is starting to produce hormones that will cause an egg to ripen and be released down the fallopian tubes.
7. As these preparatory hormones are released into her body, her body is also producing a kind of fertile mucus that she can recognize in her system. It is present throughout the whole fertile phase and will disappear 2 or 3 days after she’s ovulated..
8. If that fertile mucus appears on Monday and she ovulates on Friday, she can get pregnant from any instance of sexual intercourse from Monday on, because the mucus preserves the semen (up to five days) and carries it to the egg.
9. The mucus disappears after she has ovulated, and her temperature rises for the rest of the month, so when her temperature rises, she knows that she has ovulated.
10. There is also a change in her cervix that alerts her when she has entered the fertile phase and then again when she has left it
11. On Monday let’s say there is act of intercourse – there is only a 3% chance of pregnancy (if ovulation is Friday).
12. On Friday if there is intercourse (day of ovulation) – 43-47% chance of pregnancy
13. Saturday (the day after) – the egg dies if not fertilized
14. ***The woman cannot get pregnant for the rest of the month. It’s impossible.***
15. ***She cannot get pregnant the first 1/3 of the month because there is no egg available.***
16. ***She cannot get pregnant the final third of the month because there is no egg available.***

93% of women can learn to read their bodily signs within one month of observation (and thus know when she is fertile)

Almost all woman can do this within 3 to 4 months of observation.

**Effectiveness**

1. NFP is every bit as effective as artificial forms of contraception
2. NFP is cheap (costs nothing), efficient, perfectly healthy / without side effects; and most important, it is in line with Church teaching.

**Benefits**

1. There are no bad physical side effects. NFP marriages last longer because women who use it are less irritable, prone to depression, gaining weight, and to having a reduced sex drive compared to women taking contraceptives. The non-contracepting woman feels better, she is not taking drugs that mess up her system.
2. Using NFP requires mutual sacrifice. It takes 2 people to have sex and two people to abstain. So here it is not the responsibility on one person or another to take the necessary contraceptive steps. Both are working together. In general:

* Women think that there husbands are exceptional because they do not expect her to take all kinds of drugs that have side effects. “He enjoys my company even when I’m not sexually available.” This reminds the woman of her favorite part of the relationship in its early years, the courting period (We all know the man’s favorite part of the relationship in the early years).
* If a man is married to a woman who thinks he is exceptional, he actually believes that he is exceptional. If a man believes he is exceptional, you will have a happy man, and a happy relationship. Men need affirmation, we need to know that the women in our lives approve of us. He respects his wife/she respects him.

1. NFP enhances communication between spouses and strengthens marriage.

* About once a month, for that 7 to 10 period when a woman is ovulating and they are abstaining, a couple will want to have sex…she is fertile and males and females are more attracted to each other when the woman is fertile.

1. So they begin to have a conversation about why they decided to not have a child at that time.
2. If there is a good reason to avoid pregnancy and they talk about it, that will dampen their sexual desire.
3. But this also leads them to discuss aspects about their relationship. *How can we have another child when you don’t do what you said you would do with the children we already have / when you don’t help me out with the kids or give me any time off.* And so he responds, *I forgot about that, OK I’ll try harder.* And he does. The husband might say, *We have too many expenses, you want a new kitchen and a new bathroom…*And she might say, *Ya know, I don’t need that new kitchen/or bathroom. The youngest child is older now, so if there’s another baby around here, I can handle it.*

There is some built-in communication here…couples are forced to examine why they are having children and why they are not having children. They ask, who’s really carrying the weight/doing all the work/their fair distribution of labor? That kind of communication is extremely important and NFP couples naturally have it.

(4) NFP strengthens a couple’s relationship with God. They respect a Church that actually teaches something that is very unpopular, and they realize that the Church is following God’s laws, not human laws.

**Questions:**

*Q. Aren’t couples using Natural Family Planning doing the same thing that couples do when they use artificial forms of contraception? In other words, isn’t Natural Family Planning just a Catholic form of birth control.*

If you are asking, *can a couple use NFP in a selfish way, simply to avoid births because another child would ruin their social life?* The answer to that question is yes. The Church teaches us that we are to space births or avoid pregnancy altogether if there is a just cause…like the mother will die if she gets pregnant. However, even if a couple uses NFP for selfish reasons, NFP will over the long haul make them less selfish, because they will be forced to constantly talk about their motives for having kids or avoiding kids. This is an important conversation to have from time to time.

But if you are asking, *Is it morally equivalent to (1) have sex using an artificial form of contraception and (2) to avoid sex during a woman’s fertile period*, the answer is no. Because in the latter case you are doing nothing. There is nothing wrong with abstaining from the act during the woman’s fertile period. Here you don’t sin by doing nothing. With artificial forms of contraception, you are performing an act, but here you are not inviting God to create a new soul should He chose to do so.

*Q. What about the condom? Condoms don’t produce the same kind of negative side effects as chemical contraceptives?*

This is a good question. Again, the data I got my talk from comes from Janet Smith’s talk *Contraception Why Not?* Her website is <http://www.janetesmith.org/>. There you can find where she pulled her data from and much more. However, her arguments are basically against chemical contraceptives, so what about the condom? Suppose there is a woman who doesn’t like the side effects from chemical contraceptives but who doesn’t want to have more kids. If her husband can just wear a condom, why not just do that?

*The Short Answer*

The Church says that sex with a condom is immoral because a condom is a form of artificial birth control, and artificial birth control (i.e., contraception) severs the two aims or ends of sex, procreation (babies) and unity of the spouses (bonding). The Church teaches that the sexual act should include both those components, and the condom separates the two.

*The Long Answer*

The Church teaches that there can be legitimate reasons for spacing out births or even for not having another child, and the Church will argue that *Natural Family Planning* (NFP) can be used precisely for that purpose. Studies have shown that when the condom is used “perfectly” it is 98% effective. However, the condom is extremely prone to user error (tears in the latex, not enough lubricant, etc). There is also a “typical” use rate of 85% in preventing pregnancy. NFP is just as effective as the condom when used perfectly and is far more effective as the condom when used “typically”. Better yet, NFP is in accord with Church teaching because it involves natural sex where the two ends (babies and bonding) are not severed.

In addition, the Church wants her couples to have great sex. She wants married women to have satisfying sex and married men to have satisfying sex. There is a great book I read called *Laugh Your Way to a Better Marriage*, by Mark Gungor. He is a Protestant Pastor and I agree with 98% of what he writes in his book (He takes the view that the Catholic Church views sex as dirty and that is why her priests and religious are forced to be celibate…*that’s 1%,* and since he isn’t Catholic he doesn’t share the same views on artificial birth control…*that’s the other 1%* ). Actually, this book taught me so much about myself and about the opposite sex (and I’m a celibate priest). If you want to improve your marriage, read this book. Trust me, it’s that good. He has a section on condoms that I am going to quote at length. I do that because he gets pretty explicit and I don’t want anyone to think that I learned this stuff from experience…I didn’t, I’m a celibate priest. Ok, here is what he has to say about condoms (pp.204-205):

*This brings us to the crowning jewel of the proponents of lust: the condom. Here is where I am convinced that the modern sex experts have completely lost their minds. Wrap my most sensitive sex organ in plastic? Good grief! To me, having sex with a condom is like trying to eat an ice cream cone with a sock on your tongue.*

*Every time I see someone in a movie or on television use the words “great sex” and “condom” in the same sentence, I just shake my head in disbelief. Man, if you cannot tell the difference between sex without a condom and sex with a condom, we should have a telethon to raise money for you! To say that sex with a condom is just like sex without a condom is like saying you can’t tell the difference between filet mignon and a slice of Spam…I always discourage condoms because they interfere with real intimacy.*

*Of course, there are women who prefer condom use because it is less messy. But girls, you want your husband feeling the incredible sensation of his most sensitive flesh touching yours. It helps the guy to connect with and bond to you in a way that is just not possible with a flesh-numbing condom.*

*And here’s a little known fact: Semen improves the emotional state of women. Gordon Gallup, a psychologist at the State University of New York led a study that concluded that women who used condoms were more depressed than those who did not. After considering all potential causes, researchers could only offer the following conclusion: Semen acts as an antidepressant in women.*

Natural Family Planning is more effective than the condom in preventing pregnancy and avoids these aforementioned drawbacks. Finally, I would argue that sex is ideally an act where you share yourself completely with your spouse. It is an act where you hold nothing back. In using a condom (or any other barrier type of contraception), a man is keeping a very important part of himself from his wife (his fertility), and as noted above, this leads to a less satisfying sex life for both husband (does not feel as good) and wife (does not benefit from health benefits of semen).

*Q. Shouldn’t the Church stay out of people’s private lives? What business does the Church have in the bedroom? Besides, how can a bunch of celibate men know anything about sex or have the audacity to teach what is immoral about sexual activity.*

This is a common question (or complaint) that you always get when somebody runs out of other arguments. I would argue that sexual acts are fundamentally moral acts, that means they have a quality of right or wrong associated with them. I think just about everyone would agree with that. Would anybody honestly say that rape is a morally neutral act or that the Church should stay out of a rapist’s private life? Should the Church stay out of a pedophile’s private life? Sexual acts are moral acts, we cannot escape that. Finally God created sex, and he created it a certain way (for babies and bonding). Therefore, God’s Church has every right to speak about the morality of sexual acts.

Additionally, let us recall that in the United States, the old laws prohibiting forms of artificial contraception were put on the books by Protestant legislators, not Catholic priests. Finally, I think it is actually a good thing that celibate men who lead the Church have reminded us of the immorality of artificial contraception. Sexual pleasure is very, very powerful, it can easily change how you think, it can change how you reason. Thank God there are people (celibates) who can speak without bias about the morality of sexual acts.

1. I picked up all these numbers from Janet Smith’s talk, *Contraception, Why Not?* You can easily find it on the internet (Just type it into the Google search box). Actually, much of what you find below comes from her talk, so please take a look at her written transcript for a more detailed explanation of these issues. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)