

Contraception & Sterilization

The Beautiful, Compelling “Why’s” behind the “What”

ANY teaching of the Catholic Church can be boiled down to **LOVE**. Why? Because Jesus Himself — “The Way, the Truth, and the Life”—has taught us that Love is the bottom line, since “God is love” (1 Jn 7). The Blessed Trinity — Father, Son, and Holy Spirit — is a union and communion of love. Thus, everything, *yes, everything* the Church teaches is at the service of love and love is at the heart of her teaching on contraception and sterilization.



Most people, including most Catholics, have never been taught the “why’s” behind the “what” regarding the Church’s teaching on contraception and sterilization, among other issues concerning sexuality. What is now sweeping across the Church is a breathtaking teaching called the **Theology of the Body (TOB)**, given to us by Blessed Pope John Paul II back in the early 80’s. It gives the rationale behind the Church’s teachings in a beautiful, compelling way. Here are TOB responses to good questions.

Why is the Church fighting HHS about contraception?

The Church is fighting the HHS mandate because it is a violation of our freedom of religion. It is forcing the Catholic Church and Catholic individuals to pay for and provide contraception and sterilization through insurance plans when these are held by Church teaching as being intrinsically immoral, and therefore violating our freedom of conscience.

Why does the Church teach that contraception is wrong?

The Church’s teaching against contraception is all about defending and upholding the dignity of the human person and the true meaning of human love.

But aren’t couples using their God-given reason that produced a technology to help us to be more free?

It is true that the Church has supported many advancements in science and technology—but only when they are at the service of human dignity, and, ultimately, at the service of love. Let’s take a closer look at Jesus who shows us what love is. Jesus loves us freely, fully, faithfully, and fruitfully. **Freely**: “I give my life freely” (Jn 10:18); **Fully**: He holds nothing back, shedding flesh and blood; **Faithfully**: “I will be with you until the end of time” (Mt 28:20); **Fruitfully**: The first fruit of the Cross is the Holy Spirit, He who gives us divine life.

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Sure, Jesus is our guide to love, but how does that relate to the matter of contraception?

First, we have to remember that salvation means being in union with Jesus. And marriage is the exemplar *par excellence* of union. In fact, Pope John Paul II said that marriage is the best natural sign of the Blessed Trinity’s union, as well as the best natural sign of the union between Jesus and the Church. Pope Benedict goes so far as to say that “marriage is the ‘translation’ of the Gospel.”

Wow! Marriage has great dignity. So, what you’re saying is that Jesus is always open to life and love and that’s how marriage should be?

Precisely. Jesus consummates (“*Consummatum est*”—Jn 19:30) His love for us His Bride, the Church, on the cross—a sacrificial love, indeed. He doesn’t want any barriers between us and Him. Anything that is a barrier to an authentic relationship is a barrier to love. *Real love* is what the Church is taking a stand for when she instructs us not to use contraception.

Is the Church trying to force me to have lots of babies?

No. In fact, the Church says that no one is to interfere with parents’ right to discern the time to conceive and bear a child, and spouses are to be governed by their consciences formed in submission to the authority of the Church (*Gaudium et Spes*, 50). Big families are a great sign of God’s abundant love, but not all families are called to that. It is all about using *moral means* to plan one’s family.

For further study on the “The Contraception Problem,” visit www.ascensionpress.com.





How would you respond to those that say that the Church is so down on sex?

The Church is in no way “down” on sex. In fact, the Church desires to protect the sexual union of husband and wife as a gift from God and something sacred. The ability of man and woman to come together in total self-gift through marital love and become co-creators with God in the creation of new human life is sacred...and is at the very heart of our human dignity and being created in the image and likeness of God. What is at stake with contraception is the very truth about the human person!

Can you tell me more about what Theology of the Body teaches about sexuality and contraception?

Sure. The blueprint for every marriage is the union between Jesus and the Church. When two people marry, they make vows at the altar to love like Christ: freely, fully, faithfully, and fruitfully. A husband and wife, especially in conjugal love, express with what Pope John Paul II calls “the language of the body,” saying with their bodies what they said on the altar. When a couple uses contraception, however, they say with their bodies, “I do not give **fully**; I am holding back my fertility; I don’t accept you fully.” Now, mind you, most people do not understand this—the Church is not out to judge but to invite her members to consider the great dignity of marital love.

But without contraception, women are given a raw deal, aren’t they?

Great question, but the Church says the exact opposite. The teaching against contraception, in fact, is to prevent women from being used as objects. And Pope John Paul II says that the opposite of love is not hatred but use. Contraception distorts the gift of love and total self-gift and opens the door to man and woman using each other as objects of pleasure and self-gratification.

But doesn’t The Pill give women freedom?

That is what many may think—but let’s think about this. Doesn’t contraception say to women, that fertility is not a gift, but something to be suppressed, even to the point that is seen as a disease to be prevented? And Pope John Paul II says that a woman’s fertility is so tied to who she is, that it is almost like saying her *femininity* is a disease. It is hurting not helping women. The same thing goes with sterilization—it takes that which is working perfectly and damages it. We would never deliberately damage any other perfectly-functioning part of our body. And contraception may do more damage to the very person it claims to “protect,” by teaching her that her fertility is bad and positing deep within her a sense...

(cont. from bottom) of rejection by her husband, even when he, of course, would not consciously reject her. In fact, what is being damaged is the very dignity and identity of who a woman is at the core of her being.

Why is NFP better than artificial contraception and sterilization?

NFP (Natural Family Planning or Fertility Awareness) allows us to know and work, not against, but with our bodies in the way God designed them, affirming their inherent goodness. Through NFP, we discover that God has given in the fertility cycle of women, the power of the couple to be co-creators with Him, to decide with complete freedom, without dependence on any object that can fail, when to conceive and when not to conceive. NFP respects and affirms the dignity of the woman, of her fertility, and of the sexual union.

Does NFP work?

Yes, NFP is based on recent developments in reproductive science and empowers women and men with a tool that is more effective than The Pill.

But isn’t NFP a different form of contraception?

Not at all. NFP does not manipulate the sexual union, or reject one’s fertility. It fully respects the dignity of man and woman and the sexual union. If the couple prayerfully discerns that they ought not have a child at this moment in their family life, the husband and wife still give themselves freely, **fully**, faithfully, and even fruitfully during her infertile period, but at the moment, the wife does not have her fertility to give. Women who had been contracepting have reported that changing to NFP has allowed their husbands to find other, tender ways of expressing love which, in turn, have renewed and strengthened their marriage. Make no mistake. Sacrifice is demanded of us when using NFP. Blessed John Paul II says it is difficult but possible with God-given grace. Christ, the Bridegroom, shows us the depth of sacrifice on the Cross, and He invites couples to such sacrifice, but what also occurs is a deepening, mature love. Love is why the Church holds firm to such teachings.

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By Monica Ashour, MTS, M Hum
Executive Director of The Theology of the Body
Evangelization Team, Inc. (TOBET)

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Dr. Janet Smith’s “Contraception: Why Not?” at: www.janetsmith.org.
For a full-length talk by Monica Ashour, visit: www.tobet.org.