



Love. It's all about Love.



Contraception and 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* Mother Church teaches is at the service of love. The same goes for the teaching on contraception and sterilization.

Most people, including most Catholics, have never been taught the “why’s” behind the “what” regarding the 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. It provides the rationale behind the Church’s teachings in a beautiful, compelling way. Here are TOB responses to good questions.

Why does the Church teach that contraception is wrong? Love. It is all about love. Read on.

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 humanity, 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.

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, the late Holy Father said that marriage is the best natural sign of the Blessed Trinity’s union, as well as the union between Jesus and the Church.

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 advocating when she instructs us not to use contraception or sterilization.

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 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.

How would you respond to what some say: The Catholic Church simply has a hang-up with sex and wants to dictate the bedroom? It is true the Church is concerned with sex because marital love is so *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. It 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/contraception? Here it is in a nutshell: 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 Blessed Pope John Paul II calls “the language of the body,” saying with their bodies what they said on the altar. (TOB 117:5) When a couple uses

contraception, however, they say with their bodies, **“I do not give fully; I am holding back my fertility; I do not accept you fully.”** Now, mind you, most people do not understand this. The Church is here to teach this beautiful message of complete, sacrificial love, and invite her members to participate in the great dignity of conjugal love.

But without contraception, women are given a raw deal, aren't they? Great question, but the Church says the exact opposite. The Church teaches the counter-cultural truth that women's fertility is an incredible and unique gift to be treasured. The teaching against contraception, in fact, is to *prevent* women from being used as objects. And Pope John Paul says that the opposite of love is not hatred but **using** someone, and contraception opens the door for using. (TOB 123:1)

Doesn't "the Pill" (hormonal birth control) give women freedom? When do we take pills? When we are sick. When taken to impede procreation, doesn't the pill say that fertility is a disease? Pope John Paul says that a woman's fertility is so tied to who she is (cf. TOB 40:4; 59:3; *Familiaris Consortio* 11), that it might say to her that *femininity* is a disease. It is hurting, not helping, women. (TOB 33:1-2) 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 of rejection by her husband, even when he, of course, would not consciously reject her. Additionally, “the pill” has side effects ranging from migraines to blood clots. And the World Health Organization has concluded that the chemicals contained in “the pill” are a Group 1 Carcinogen – meaning they can cause cancer in humans ([World Health Organization Data on Birth Control Pill and Estrogen Replacement Carcinogenicity](#), by Dr. Gerard Nadal, Feb. 15, 2012; National Cancer Inst. Fact Sheet: [Oral Contraceptives and Cancer Risk: Questions and Answers](#)). The Church knows that sometimes a woman needs to correct that which is wrong by medication – but such medication should not be taken for the purpose of preventing pregnancy (*Humanae Vitae* 15). Consultation with an NFP-practicing physician is recommended in this instance.

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 outside object, when to try to conceive and when not to try to conceive.

Does NFP work? Yes, NFP is based on recent developments in reproductive science and empowers women and men with a tool that assists in achieving pregnancy and is 99% effective in spacing pregnancies when practiced correctly. (*See for example*, <http://ccli.org/nfp/effectiveness/compare-methods.php>.)

But isn't NFP a different form of contraception? Not at all. If the couple **prayerfully discerns** that they have a serious reason to seek not to conceive a child at this moment in their family life, the husband and wife still give themselves **fully** during her infertile period; that is a time when the wife does not have her fertility to give. Plus, NFP is *all-natural*, very “green” with physical, emotional and spiritual benefits. In addition to avoiding the side effects of hormonal contraception, women who embrace NFP have reported their husbands have found other, tender ways of expressing love which, in turn, have renewed and strengthened their marriage. But 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. (TOB 131:5)

What's the bottom line? The Church's teaching on the beauty of marital love provides us the tools to give freely and fully in the model of Christ's sacrificial love. We need only be open to this gift.

For further study, visit www.prolifedallas.org/contraception; for presentations, contact Theology of the Body Evangelization Team at info@tobet.org or 972-849-6543, or the Catholic Pro-Life Committee Speakers Bureau at speakers@prolifedallas.org or 972-267-LIFE (5433).