



“They are trees planted by streams of water; they bear fruit; their leaves do not wither; in all that they do they prosper.” Ps 1:3

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The Theme for 2010: Live By the Spirit (Gal 5:16)

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PREPARING FOR PENTECOST

Do we recall the eager anticipation with which we look forward to the great feast of Christmas? How joyfully we plan to Celebrate? The sweets; the gifts; the new clothes, the list is endless. How we long for that day to dawn? What joy fills our hearts when we wake on Christmas morning! Literally hundreds of greetings and felicitations pour in from family here and overseas, friends and acquaintances. The wonder and joy of Christmas Day stays with us for many days after.

Dear Brothers and Sisters, **this is exactly how** our beloved Holy Spirit wishes us to look forward to **and prepare for HIS own Holy-Day, His Feast of Pentecost.**

Pentecost was the second of the 3 most important Jewish pilgrimage festivals (Passover, Pentecost, Tabernacles) when every Jewish man and woman was expected to travel from wherever they were to the Temple in Jerusalem, to make their love offerings.

Pentecost is the Greek equivalent for the Hebrew word 'Shauvot'. Pentecost occurs 50 days after Passover. Pentecost is also called the **Feast of Weeks** because it is celebrated 7 weeks (49 days) after Passover. The Festival is also called the feast of

the **Ingathering and the Day of the First Fruits**. It marked the end of the barley season and the beginning of the wheat harvest. Two wheat loaves made of the finest wheat were used as a **wave offering** before the Lord in the temple and first fruits of the harvest were also offered.

For Catholics Pentecost has an extremely important significance as the **‘Birthday of the Catholic Church,’** because, Two Thousand years ago, that was the Feast day on which the Promised Holy Spirit manifested Himself. That was the fateful day upon which the Catholic Church was really and truly born; that fateful day when a gathering of 120 frightened Apostles, Disciples and Holy Women who were more timid than mice were all at once transformed into **mighty Lions for Christ!**

There is a theological significance for the Holy Spirit choosing to make the Feast of Pentecost His own feast and the day on which to make His Appearance with so much power. The Jews celebrated, on Pentecost, the Lord’s generosity and providence in granting them a good harvest and an abundance of food for their **physical needs**. The Holy Spirit was ‘Given’ to us by Jesus Christ and God the Father **for our eternal and everlasting Spiritual Food!** This, then is why we Catholics need to celebrate Pentecost.

There is also a deep theological significance in why the Holy Spirit chose to manifest His arrival through a Powerful Wind and by Holy Fire.

Jesus told Nicodemus, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born anew.' The wind blows where it wills, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know whence it comes or whither it goes; so it is with every one who is born of the Spirit." Jn 3:5-8. The word Jesus uses here for the Holy Spirit is “Ruach” meaning Breath, or Air or Wind. Hence the Symbolism of Wind or Breath is attached to the Holy Spirit

The presence of the Spirit of God in Holy Fire first occurred when God spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai and again when God in a pillar of fire led the Hebrews away from the Egyptians.

The Holy Spirit uses both manifestations of Wind and Holy Fire when He Descends in

Power and transforms all those huddled in the Cenacle. After their '**Regeneration**' or **Baptism in the Spirit**, they rushed forth, fearlessly, to proclaim the Good News. Jerusalem and Palestine could not contain their exuberance and Evangelical zeal and hence they spread all through the world, carrying the Good News and the message of Salvation.

The HS wants to do the same for you this Pentecost. **He wants to renew your Spiritual life; he wants to fill you afresh with newfound zeal; he wants to help you shed your cloak of timidity, stand tall and take your rightful place in His kingdom as an Evangelist, Teacher, Miracle Worker or Healer.** All this He can and will do for you, but are you ready? Do you sincerely desire to be transformed from the inside out? Are you ready to let go of your self imposed Bondages? Do you want to be filled once again with His blazing Fire? **In short, do you really want to walk in the Spirit?**

If you sincerely do want the Holy Spirit of God to transform your lives then Dear Brothers and Sisters, here is a lovely Prayer of Consecration for you.

Act of Consecration to the HS

O Mighty Holy Spirit of God, before the great multitude of heavenly witnesses, I offer myself Spirit, Soul and Body to Thee, O Most Holy Spirit of God. I adore the brightness of Thy purity, the unerring keenness of Thy justice, and the might of Thy love. Thou art the Strength and Light of my soul. In Thee I live and move and am. I desire never to grieve Thee by unfaithfulness to grace, and I pray with all my heart, to be kept from the smallest sin against Thee. Mercifully guard my every thought, and grant that I may always, watch for Thy light, listen to Thy voice, and follow Thy gracious inspirations. I cling to Thee and give myself to Thee, and ask Thee by Thy compassion, to watch over me in my weakness. Give me grace, O Holy Spirit of the Father and the Son, to say to Thee always and everywhere, Speak Lord, for Thy servant heareth. Amen.

In Acts 19:1-7 we read, "Paul traveled through the interior of the country and came (down) to Ephesus where he found some disciples. He said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?" They answered him, "We have never even heard that there is a Holy Spirit." And when Paul laid (his) hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied.

Those Ephesians like all of us, were already disciples of Jesus; All of them had already had the good News of salvation preached to them. Yet they all had a serious deficiency in their Theology. They did not really know anything about the HS. **They had as yet no ‘Personal Relationship’ with Him.**

If The Apostle Paul was here with us today; if he was to look us directly in the eye and if he was to pose this same question to us, **“did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?”** If Paul goes on to ask us if we have a **‘personal relationship’** with the HS; if we had received and practiced the Gifts of the HS, if we practiced Discernment, if we prophesied, could interpret tongues, could perform works of healing, etc., what would be our true and honest response?

Many of us will reply; “Yes Paul, we know that we must have received the Holy Spirit because we received the HS at our Baptism and Confirmation and we all have attended many Life in the Spirit Seminars, however, we don’t really know too much about the HS, we don’t have a personal relationship with Him and we certainly don’t know much about these strange gifts you speak about!

Some may sadly confess, “ Yes Paul, once, a long time back I did receive the Holy Spirit powerfully again during my personal renewal, Once, long back, I enjoyed such a close personal relationship with Him; Once I was on Fire with love and power because of this loving and wonderful relationship; but, Paul, that was a long time back; to be absolutely honest, Paul, somewhere along the way my loving vibrant relationship has gone cold; sometime along the way that fire went out; today the HS is almost like a total stranger to me!

But only a very select and fortunate few will be able to affirm, “Oh Yes, dear Paul, I have received the HS powerfully not only when I first came to the Charismatic renewal but again and again I experience fresh infillings so regularly. And indeed Paul, because I have a constant, intimate Personal relationship with the HS, I am gifted with, and frequently use His gifts of Discernment, Prophecy and Healing and teaching, to help build my Catholic community.

Dear Friends, each of us knows in our hearts to which category of Catholics we belong, however, whether we are New in the Spirit or Alive and Active in the Spirit or Stale in the Spirit, **this Pentecost**, the Holy Spirit will bless you, if you so desire, with all your heart, for a deeper and infinitely more rewarding Personal relationship with

Him. Let us ask Him to change our hearts of stone, by repenting of our transgressions and by renewing our promises of fidelity to Him.

May God the Holy Spirit reward us all this Holy Pentecost, with a fresh Infilling of His Power and Grace.

Ken Borthwick

Should we call No Man "Father"?

Many Protestants claim that when Catholics address priests as "father," they are engaging in an unbiblical practice that Jesus forbade: "Call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven" (Matt. 23:9). How should we Catholics respond to such objections?

The Answer:

To understand why the charge does not work, one must first understand the use of the word "father" in reference to our earthly fathers. No one would deny a little girl the opportunity to tell someone that she loves her father. Common sense tells us that Jesus wasn't forbidding this type of use of the word "father." In fact, to forbid it would rob the address "Father" of its meaning when applied to God, for there would no longer be any earthly counterpart for the analogy of divine Fatherhood. The concept of God's role as Father would be meaningless if we obliterated the concept of earthly fatherhood.

But in the Bible the concept of fatherhood is not restricted to just our earthly fathers and God. It is used to refer to people other than biological or legal fathers, and is used as a sign of respect to those with whom we have a special relationship. For example, Joseph tells his brothers of a special 'fatherly' relationship God had given him with the king of Egypt: "So it was not you who sent me here, but God; and he has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt" (Gen. 45:8).

And God himself declares that he will give a fatherly role to Eliakim, the steward of the house of David: "In that day I will call my servant Eliakim, the son of Hilkiyah . . . and he shall be a **father** to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah" (Is. 22:20–21).

This type of fatherhood not only applies to those who are wise counselors (like Joseph or Eliakim), it also applies to those who have a fatherly spiritual relationship with one. For example, Elisha cries, "My father, my father!" to Elijah as the latter is carried up to heaven in a whirlwind (2 Kgs. 2:12). Later, Elisha himself is called a father by the king of Israel (2 Kgs. 6:21).

A Change with the New Testament?

Some Fundamentalists argue that this usage changed with the New Testament—that while it may have been permissible to call certain men "father" in the Old Testament, since the time of Christ, it's no longer allowed. This argument fails for several reasons.

First, as we've seen, the imperative "call no man father" does not apply to one's biological father. It also doesn't exclude calling one's ancestors "father," as is shown in Acts 7:2, where Stephen refers to "our father Abraham," or in Rom 9:10, where Paul speaks of "our father Isaac."

Second, there are numerous examples in the New Testament of the term "father" being used as a form of address and respect, even for men who are not biologically related to the speaker. There are, in fact, so many uses of "father" in the New Testament, that the Fundamentalist interpretation of Matthew 23 (and the objection to Catholics calling priests "father") must be wrong, as we shall see.

Third, a careful examination of the context of Matthew 23 shows that Jesus didn't intend for his words here to be understood literally. The whole passage reads, "But you are not to be called 'rabbi,' for you have one teacher, and you are all brethren. And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven. Neither be called 'masters,' for you have one master, the Christ" (Matt. 23:8–10).

The first problem is that although Jesus seems to prohibit the use of the term "teacher," in Matthew 28:19–20, Christ himself appointed certain men to be teachers in his Church: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations . . . teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you." Paul speaks of his commission as a teacher: "For this gospel I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher" (2 Tim. 1:11). He also reminds us that the Church has an office of teacher: "God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers" (1 Cor. 12:28); There is no doubt that Paul was not violating Christ's teaching in Matthew 23 by referring so often to others as "teachers."

Fundamentalists themselves slip up on this point by calling all sorts of people "doctor," for example, medical doctors, as well as professors and scientists who have Ph.D. degrees (i.e., doctorates). What they fail to realize is that "doctor" is simply the Latin word for "teacher." Even "Mister" and "Mistress" ("Mrs.") are forms of the word "master," also mentioned by Jesus. So if his words in Matthew 23 were meant to be taken literally, Fundamentalists would be just as guilty for using the word "teacher" and "doctor" and "mister" as Catholics for saying "father." But clearly, that would be a misunderstanding of Christ's words.

So What Did Jesus Mean?

Jesus criticized Jewish leaders who love "the place of honor at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues, and salutations in the market places, and being called 'rabbi' by men" (Matt. 23:6–7). His admonition here is a response to the Pharisees' proud hearts and their grasping after marks of status and prestige.

He was using hyperbole (exaggeration to make a point) to show the scribes and Pharisees how sinful and proud they were for not looking humbly to God as the source of all authority and fatherhood and teaching, and instead setting themselves up as the Ultimate authorities, father figures, and teachers.

Christ used hyperbole often, for example when he declared, "If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and throw it away; it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell" (Matt. 5:29, cf. 18:9; Mark 9:47). Christ certainly did not intend this to be applied literally, for otherwise all Christians would be blind amputees! (cf. 1 John 1:8; 1 Tim. 1:15) because we are all subject to "the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life" (1 John 2:16). This is an interesting point for our 'Fundamentalists' to chew on. Would they 'pluck out an eye when they sin'?

Since Jesus is demonstrably using hyperbole when he says not to call anyone our father—else we would not be able to refer to our earthly fathers as such—we must read his words carefully and with sensitivity to the presence of hyperbole if we wish to understand what he is saying.

Jesus is not forbidding us to call men "fathers" who actually are such—either literally or spiritually. (See below on the apostolic example of spiritual fatherhood.) To refer to such people as fathers is only to acknowledge the truth, and Jesus is not against that. He is warning people against inaccurately attributing fatherhood—or a particular kind or degree of fatherhood—to those who do not have it.

What must not be done is to confuse any form of spiritual paternity with that of God. Ultimately, God is our supreme protector, provider, and instructor. Correspondingly, it is wrong to view any individual other than God as having these roles.

Throughout the world, some people have been tempted to look upon religious leaders who are mere mortals as if they were an individual's supreme source of spiritual instruction, nourishment, and protection. The tendency to turn mere men into "gurus" is worldwide.

This was also a temptation in the Jewish world of Jesus' day, when famous rabbinical leaders, especially those who founded important schools, such as Hillel and Shammai,

were highly exalted by their disciples. It is this elevation of an individual man—the formation of a "cult of personality" around him—of which Jesus is speaking when he warns against attributing to someone an undue role as master, father, or teacher.

He is not forbidding the perfunctory use of honorifics nor forbidding us to recognize that the person does have a role as a spiritual father and teacher.

The example of Jesus' apostles shows us that.

The Apostles Show the Way:

The New Testament is filled with examples of and references to spiritual father-son and father-child relationships. Many people are not aware just how common these are, so it is worth quoting some of them here.

Paul regularly referred to Timothy as his child: "Therefore I sent to you Timothy, my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind you of my ways in Christ" (1 Cor. 4:17); See also 1 Tim. 1:2, 2 Tim. 1:2, 1 Tim 1:18, 2 Tim. 2:1 and Phil. 2:22.

Paul also referred to other of his converts in this way: "To Titus, my true child in a common faith: grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior" (Titus 1:4); See also Philem. 10. None of these men were Paul's literal, biological sons. Rather, Paul is emphasizing his **spiritual fatherhood with them.**

Spiritual Fatherhood:

Perhaps the most pointed New Testament reference to the theology of the spiritual fatherhood of priests is Paul's statement, "I do not write this to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children. **For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel.**"(1 Cor. 4:14–15).

Peter followed the same custom, referring to Mark as his son: "She who is at Babylon, who is likewise chosen, sends you greetings; and so does my son Mark" (1 Pet. 5:13). See also 2 Cor. 12:14; and Gal. 4:19.

John said, "My little children, I am writing this to you so that you may not sin; but if any one does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 John 2:1). See also 3 John 4 and 1 John 2:13–14.

By referring to these people as their spiritual sons and spiritual children, Peter, Paul, and John imply their own roles as spiritual fathers. Since the Bible frequently speaks of this spiritual fatherhood, we Catholics acknowledge it and follow the custom of the apostles by calling priests "father." **Failure to acknowledge this is a failure to recognize and honor a great gift God has bestowed on the Church: the spiritual fatherhood of the priesthood.**

Catholics know that as members of a parish, they have been committed to a priest's

spiritual care, thus they have great filial affection for priests and call them "father." Priests, in turn, follow the apostles' biblical example by referring to members of their flock as "my son" or "my child".

All of these passages were written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and they express the infallibly recorded truth that Christ's ministers do have a role as spiritual fathers. Jesus is not against acknowledging that. It is he who gave these men their role as spiritual fathers, and it is his Holy Spirit who recorded this role for us in the pages of Scripture. To acknowledge spiritual fatherhood is to acknowledge the truth, and no amount of anti-Catholic grumbling will change that fact.

NIHIL OBSTAT: I have concluded that the materials presented in this work are free of doctrinal or moral errors. Bernadeane Carr, STL, Censor Librorum, August 10, 2004

IMPRIMATUR: In accord with 1983 CIC 827, permission to publish this work is hereby granted. +Robert H. Brom, Bishop of San Diego, August 10, 2004

JIM BLACKBURN Catholic Apologist

MOTHER MARY-AN EPITOME OF EVERLASTING BEAUTY

Unassuming in nature, she unfailingly led a simple life
Doing God's will helped her overcome all strife
She was enriched in wisdom, so divine and sincere
Found favour in the eyes of God, in all those around her.

One day, as she was doing all that was wanted of her,
She was immensely blessed to see God's angel shining light upon her,
He came with a message, bringing salvation to the world
She was to be the Mother of God, so she faithfully obeyed his Word.

A Virgin, born without sin
Doubtless, no anxiety she bore within
She knew her destiny was in the hands of her Lord,
And humbly accepted the desire of God.

She gave birth to a Son, the Saviour of the world,
Who would lay down his life to fulfill the Good Word.
She knew a sword would pierce her heart one day,
She braced herself to take care of him all along the way.

MOTHER MARY, a Mother to all of us

A striking example of obedience, of devotion
She'll always be pleasing in God's sight
Let's look up to her to bring us to back to light....

Amanda L. Lobo

ANSWERS to Bible Quiz #43

- 1) Justice, mercy and faithfulness. **Mt 23:23**
- 2) Eat, drink, marry and give in marriage. **Mt 24:38.**
- 3) Thirty coins of silver **Mt 26:15.**
- 4) "The flesh is weak" **Mt 26:41.**
- 5) "Will die by the sword". **Mt 26:52.**
- 6) The wife of Pontius Pilate **.Mt 27:19.**
- 7) St. Peter. **Mt 26:74.**
- 8) Judas Iscariot. **Mt 26:48.**
- 9) Simon of Cyrene. **Mt 27:32.**
- 10) The place of the Skull. **Mt 27:33.**

Winners of Bible Quiz #43

Above 10: Savio Vaz, Janice Saldanha, Joash Saldanha, Lester Cardoz, Elvita Lobo.

Congratulations to these Children who made answered this Quiz despite their busy examination preparations. May God Bless them mightily for their efforts.

CHILDRENS BIBLE ESSAY WRITING COMPETITION:

Please Read **1 Corinthians Chapter 12.** You will find several Special Gifts of the Holy Spirit listed.

Choose **any one** of these several Gifts and then write a short Essay titled:
"If I had the Gift of....., this is how I would use it."

Juniors below 10, should write a 250 to 300 word Essay

Seniors above 10, should write a 600 word (Max) Essay

Parents please encourage your children to write the Essay **themselves**. While you may give them a **little guidance**, please ensure that the essay truly reflects your child's own efforts. Points will be given for vocabulary, style, originality, grammar and correct punctuation.

A panel of judges from the CT and XCT will choose a winner and a runner-up from each Age Group. Prizes will be Awarded and the winning and runner-up Essays will

be published in Oasis.

Drop the Essay into the box or hand same **only** to Bro Ken Borthwick before 15th June 2010.

SMILE AWHILE

A young man who was not a regular church-goer, bumped into his Pastor at the Supermarket. The Pastor grabbed him by the arm, drew him aside and said, "Son, you need to join the Army of the Lord!"

The young man replied, "I'm already in the Army of the Lord, Pastor."
The Pastor questioned, "How come I don't "see you except at Christmas?"
The young man whispered back, "**I'm in the secret service.**"



One Sunday morning, everyone in the tiny Country town went to the local church. Before the services started, the townspeople were all happily sitting in the pews. Suddenly, satan appeared at the front of the church, ranting and raving, his red eyes bulging, spitting fire and shaking his fists at the shocked congregation!! Everyone started screaming and running for the entrance, trampling each other in a frantic effort to get away from the evil, terrifying apparition. In seconds the church was empty, except for satan and one little old lady in the front pew.

She sat calmly, unmoved that God's ultimate enemy stood in front of her. Now this really bugged and irritated satan, so he swaggered up to the old lady and screamed, "**Don't you know who I am?**"

"**Yep, sure do,**" the old lady replied.

Satan was absolutely stunned! He asked, "**Aren't you afraid of me?**"

Calmly she replied, "**Nope, sure ain't!**"

Satan, by now completely deflated and befuddled, pleads, "**Why aren't you afraid of me?**"

The lil' ol' lady bluntly replied, "**Been married to your brother for 56 years.**"



Contraception: The Bitter Pill

Each month, to test our courage, my wife Lisa and I stand before an auditorium full of couples about to marry in the Catholic Church and explain to them the Church's teachings about sexuality. The crowd is generally not happy to be there. Many are not Catholic and few, needless to say, want to hear what the Church has to say about sex and contraception. They've heard it already on the afternoon talk shows from renegade nuns. This is, moreover, the upper east side of Manhattan, a tough market for *Humanae Vitae*.

We tell our restive audience that what they are about to hear is counter-cultural. We

try to pique their curiosity: What arguments can there possibly be against using the pill? Proof texts are lacking in Scripture and we wouldn't use them anyway. The last thing you do with a crowd of post-baby boom Catholics is argue from the top down. What we have to do is persuade them that getting rid of their pills and diaphragms will actually make them happier. Then, gently, we can slip in a few natural law arguments about sex and babies.

The challenge is to put the cultural coordinates back to where they were seventy years ago. Until 1930, not only did every Christian denomination teach that contraception is wrong, but even the mainstream of media and politics did not approve of it. The ubiquitous state laws against selling birth control devices were the work of Protestant, not Catholic, legislatures. When, at the Lambeth Conference in 1930, the Anglican Church became the first Christian body to change its mind about contraception, the Washington Post was as indignant as Pope Pius XI. It seemed self-evident to at least a plurality of Christians that the deliberate obstruction of the life-making potential of sex is a gravely disordered act.

Disrupting Marriage

The use of contraceptives did not really take off until the advent of the pill in the early '60s. At the time, the pill was heralded as a great boon to married couples because it would remove from sex the fear of pregnancy. The divorce rate in America was 25 percent. It proceeded to double quite rapidly. While there were a number of reasons for this general breakdown of marriage, the pill certainly contributed. One obvious reason is that it makes infidelity easier by taking babies out of the picture. It also turns premarital sex into a recreation like tennis or bungee jumping, so that many enter marriage with a consumerist attitude toward sex that is easily bored and dissatisfied.

But there are more profound reasons why the pill is so disruptive to marital happiness. It has to do with the nature of sexuality itself. Sex, we tell our audience, is a mystery that can never be reduced to mere biology. It has a meaning far beyond the physical act of love. In *The Graduate* when Mr. Robinson confronts young Benjamin Braddock about his adultery with Mrs. Robinson, Benjamin defends himself by saying that it was no big deal: "Mrs. Robinson and I might just as well have been shaking hands." Mr. Robinson gets even more upset, and rightly so; because behind Benjamin's statement is a 'gnostic' separation of spirit and flesh, of heart and body, which even the dimmest of cuckolds can sense is utterly wrong.

Our culture has been able to turn sex into a casual activity because it has separated personhood from the human body. Most people have the idea that their real self is somewhere inside the proverbial ghost in the machine and that what they do with their bodies doesn't make much difference. But this has never been the view of the Church, which teaches that the body is not a mere appendage, but is as much a part of us as our soul. After all, we don't say in the Nicene Creed that we believe in the immortality of

the soul, but in the resurrection of the body. In a very significant way, we are what we do with our bodies.

The Old Testament uses a very interesting verb for sex: to "know." One of the things we surrender in the act of love is knowledge about ourselves that only our spouse should have. Nobody has written about these aspects of sex more profoundly than John Paul II in Love and Responsibility (1959). In that book, the future philosopher-pope argues further that each person is an irreducible subject "a person, not a thing," who ought never to be used as an object. As we know, sex is an appetite which has a tendency to do just that: to treat persons as objects. A couple can easily slip into treating one another as objects, as things to be used in bed, rather than as persons giving and receiving the spousal gift of love. And this may be why so many couples are bored by modern sex: You can tire of an object, while you can never tire of a person.

There is also the matter of babies. God's first command to humanity was to be fruitful and multiply. For those made uncomfortable by divine injunctions, the most elementary biology textbook will explain that sex is for making babies. And since sex is such a deep part our identity, it may be that when you sterilize the baby-making potential of sex, you are doing damage to yourself.

Artificial contraception is wrong because it violates the gift of self that ought to be at the center of every act of physical love. When you take the pill or use a foam, diaphragm, condom, or whatever, you are, in effect, saying to your spouse, "In this, the most intimate act of our marriage, I am going to give myself to you, but only up to a point." Or, conversely, you are saying, "I want you in this act to make a total gift to me of yourself, except that part of you which so deeply defines you as a sexual being, your fertility."

The body has its own deep language, and when we add chemicals or latex to the act of love, when we deliberately destroy its potential for making new life, we falsify the nuptial meaning of its actions. We hold back the full gift of self which during the wife's fertile period must include openness to new life.

A couple who uses artificial birth control is not only falsifying the meaning of sex, they are also behaving immaturely: trying to extract gratification from an act while getting rid of its natural consequences. It is not unlike certain eating disorders.

Chesterton put it well when he said that birth control "is a name given to a succession of different expedients by which it is possible to filch the pleasure belonging to a natural process while violently and unnaturally thwarting the process itself."

Child Spacing and NFP

At this point, an obvious objection appears on the faces in our audience. Is the Church

telling us that we have to have one baby after another? What about my career? And my health? But the Church recognizes that there are legitimate reasons for spacing children. All that is asked is that a couple be generous and not put selfish motives first. And besides, the best thing you can do for a child is to provide siblings. It is, paradoxically, more difficult to do a good job bringing up one or two children than three or four.

If the arrival of children needs to be spaced (a job once done quite effectively by full-time breast-feeding), there is a morally acceptable way of doing it: Natural Family Planning. NFP is one of the best-kept secrets in the Catholic Church (and the medical profession), and most of our pre-cana audience is no doubt hearing about it for the first time.

The general ignorance surrounding NFP is a real tragedy, because couples who use it almost universally report what a boon it is to their marriage. NFP is not "Catholic birth control." Nor is it the calendar rhythm method, which has a 15 percent failure rate and went out the window decades ago. It is a method whereby both partners exercise restraint during the wife's fertile period, which is determined by a few simple symptoms. Used correctly, it is more effective than the pill. And it ought to be noted that the more effective an artificial contraceptive is, the more potentially harmful side-effects there are for the wife.

An obvious question occurs to our audience, one that is a stumbling block for any number of otherwise clever theologians: Since artificial contraception and Natural Family Planning have the same goal -- to postpone the arrival of a child -- what is the moral difference between them? Why should a little piece of plastic or a small dose of hormones be such a big deal?

But NFP and artificial contraception do not, strictly speaking, have the same goal, since NFP is used by couples to help conceive as well as to space children, while artificial contraception is used only to block conception. (A dividend of the sexual revolution is that one in six couples now has trouble conceiving, which gives NFP additional marketing appeal.) And even when the goal is the same -- the postponement of a child -- everyone would agree that the means used to achieve a goal can be either good or bad. For example, if you need a hundred dollars, you can either rob a bank or earn the money.

When it comes to spacing children, there is all the difference in the world between sex that is non-procreative, because it takes place during the infertile part of the wife's cycle, and sex that is anti-procreative. The couple using NFP is accepting their fertility as it is: a great good, but a good which they are not going to use at this time. The husband respects his wife's cycle and does not try to manipulate it.

But a couple on artificial birth control is treating their fertility as though there were something wrong with it, something that has to be gotten rid of by medication or barrier. (The latter is a revealing term: "I want to make love to you, I want to give myself to you, but first let me put in my barrier.") A pill is what you take when you have an illness: couples who use contraceptives

are treating their fertility, whose depth and mystery they ought to revere, as a defect in need of a technological fix.

The Fork in the Road

The Church does not teach that an act is evil because it makes people unhappy, but it does affirm that evil acts will inevitably have that result. Women who use contraceptives often complain that they feel like they are being used as objects and that their sex life is flat. Couples who use NFP never seem to have this problem. In the latter case, the wife, whose sensitivity in this area is usually keener, has the assurance that her husband loves her enough to practice self-control. And besides, abstinence is the best of aphrodisiacs. There is nothing like periodic continence to keep one's sex life interesting. It's like going on a honeymoon twice a month. A Jewish rabbi once told *New York* magazine that orthodox Jewish women, who have to abstain from sex for a period after menstruation, universally report that periodic continence keeps their sex fresh and entertaining.

In the end, couples who use NFP and those who use contraceptives are living two radically different versions of physical love. One accepts the gift of sexuality exactly as it is stamped in the human person by God; the other rejects it. And this severing of life and love is not healthy for a marriage. In fact, a void can open up in the love life of a contracepting couple, a void that is usually first noticed by the wife. Two statistics tell the whole story: The divorce rate among couples who use NFP is somewhere between 1 and 3 percent, while the divorce rate among couples who use contraceptives is well over the 50 percent national rate.

This is the message of *Humanae Vitae* that nobody gets: When you try to short-circuit the procreative end of sexuality, you also hurt the unitive. There is simply no way of separating them.

There is another unseemly aspect of the pill that is only now getting attention: its strong causal link to abortion. In one respect, "contraceptive" is a misnomer for the pill, because it sometimes does its work after conception by preventing the fertilized egg from implanting in the mother's womb. In other words, it is an abortifacient. But the link to abortion goes further. The essence of the contraceptive mentality is to drive a wedge between sex and babies. Once a society does this and goes on a spree of sterilized sex, it has to have abortion as a backup in case a contraceptive fails or (as happens with teenagers) isn't pulled out of the pocket at the critical moment.

The Church's insistence on the link between contraception and abortion occasionally gets support in surprising quarters. In *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* the U.S. Supreme Court, on its perennial search for the most plausible-sounding sophistries to uphold legalized abortion, stated:

For two decades 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.

In other words, we assume that we need abortion so that people can continue their contraceptive lifestyles.

Not Animals

The clash over contraception in the final analysis involves two irreconcilable views of the human person and sexuality. Humans are not brute animals; we are created in the image of God. We do not reproduce, we procreate; and the place to look for an ethics of sexuality is not in the rest of the animal kingdom, but in the other direction, at the three persons of the Holy Trinity in the act of eternal, mutual self-giving. The entire Christian world once understood this, and Protestants who think that this is no longer an issue ought to examine their own heritage. Luther and Calvin both taught that artificial birth control is intrinsically evil. So did Karl Barth, who wrote Paul VI a warm letter of praise after the publication of *Humanae Vitae*. The modern world has evacuated the marital act of its mystery and sanctity and it is sad that most denominations have gone along, hesitantly at first, only to proceed enthusiastically.

Much of the official Catholic apparatus also goes flopping along with the contraceptive culture. Many pre-cana programs actually promote artificial birth control, which means that they indirectly promote abortion. The pope, as usual, has a deeper insight than his middle management into the centrality of contraception in the array of life issues. In *Evangelium Vitae*, the first institutional step he proposes in the battle against the culture of death is the establishment of teaching centers for natural methods of regulating fertility. Unfortunately, the laity get little encouragement in this area. This is partly because the progressive wing of the Church, which controls most of the chanceries and seminaries, has never focused on Natural Family Planning. They consider it part of the baggage of *Humanae Vitae*, a document they shun like a vampire avoids sunlight.

Still, there are reasons to be optimistic that contraceptives will someday go away. At the end of each of our marriage preparation sessions, couples who seem to have little use for most Church teachings come up and say that NFP actually sounds like a good idea. Women, in particular, may decide on purely feminist grounds that artificially thwarting their fertility is demeaning. And, so far as the intellectual debate goes, Chesterton, our guide and mentor, made the amusing observation that "the more my opponents practice Birth Control, the fewer there will be of them to fight us."

George Sim Johnston

Editorial Note:-

This Edition of Oasis has been compiled by and is brought to you with the prayers and blessings of "***Team B***"

MIPC Prayer Meeting: Every Wednesday at 8:00 pm in the Parish Hall.

General Intercessory Meeting: Last Monday of every month at 8:00 pm.

Community Mass: Every Friday at 9.00 a.m. except the last Friday of the month.