

Session 33: Marriage and the Family

HYMN: Holy Family, Pattern, Model



Joseph, just man, spouse of Mary,
 legal father of her Son,
 Son of David, told to name Him,
 thus you made the holy One,
 Son of God, the Son of David,
 as the prophecies had run.

Mary, virgin new-betrothèd,
 you the angel's message heard.
 Full of grace, the Lord was with
 you,
 By no sin were you deterred.
 Docile to the Holy Spirit,
 you conceived th'eternal Word.

Jesus, God the Son incarnate,
 Son of God, yet Son of Man,
 to Your parents most obedient,
 thus our ransom You began,
 growing up in grace and wisdom,
 following Your Father's plan.

Joseph, caring for your charges,
 shielding wife and Son from foe,
 you taught Jesus law and Scripture,
 love of wood and work to know.
 Joseph, head of God's own fam'ly,
 guide all husbands here below.

Mary, to your spouse most faithful,
 to your Son devoted, true,
 wife and mother, you taught Jesus
 prayer and play and language, too.
 Mary, heart of God's own fam'ly,
 make all wives on earth like you.

Holy Fam'ly, pattern, model
 for all fam'lies ev'rywhere,
 teach us how to live as you did:
 how to love and how to share.
 As we follow your example,
 keep us in your loving care.

PRAYER:

Let us pray:
 God, our Father,
 look upon us with love.

You redeemed us
 and made us Your children in Christ.
 Give us true freedom
 and bring us to the inheritance
 You promised.
 Through our Lord Jesus Christ,
 Your Son,
 Who lives and reigns with You
 in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
 God, for ever and ever.
 — Amen

READING:

Lk 2:41-52

The Lord be with you.

— *And with your spirit*A Reading from the holy Gospel
 according to Luke— *Glory to You, O Lord*Each year Jesus' parents
 went to Jerusalemfor the feast of Passover,
 and when He was twelve years old,
 they went up
 according to festival custom.After they had completed its days,
 as they were returning,
 the Boy Jesus remained behind
 in Jerusalem,but His parents did not know it.
 Thinking that He was in the caravan,
 they journeyed for a day
 and looked for Him
 among their relatives
 and acquaintances,
 but not finding Him,
 they returned to Jerusalem
 to look for Him.After three days
 they found Him in the temple,
 sitting in the midst
 of the teachers,
 listening to them
 and asking them questions,
 and all who heard Him
 were astounded
 at His understanding
 and His answers.When His parents saw Him,
 they were astonished,
 and His mother said to Him,
 "Son, why have You done this to us?
 Your father and I
 have been looking for You
 with great anxiety."

And He said to them, —

"Why were you looking for Me?
Did you not know
that I must be
in My Father's house?"

But they did not understand
what He said to them.

He went down with them
and came to Nazareth,
and was obedient to them;
and His mother kept all these things
in her heart.

And Jesus advanced
in wisdom and age and favour
before God and man.
The Gospel of the Lord

— *Praise to You, Lord Jesus Christ*

in a special way
in His own creative work,
He blessed them, saying,
"Be fruitful and multiply."

Through married love
and the whole structure
of family life
that results from it,
God increases and enriches His
family.

The well-being
of both human and Christian society
is closely bound up
with the healthy state
of conjugal and family life.

IN BRIEF: WHAT THE CHURCH TEACHES

Because God made us in His image,
He wrote into the nature
of man and woman
the vocation,
the capacity,
and the responsibility
of love and communion.

Love is the fundamental
and inborn vocation
of every human being.
We are called to love
in our unified totality,
body and soul.

There are two ways
in which we can respond
to this vocation:
one is Matrimony,
and the other is virginity
or celibacy.

The vocation to marriage
is written in the nature
of man and woman
as they came
from the hand of the Creator.

Marriage is not
a purely human institution,
despite the many variations
it has undergone
through the centuries.

By its nature,
marriage is ordered
to the procreation and education
of offspring.

From the beginning
God made them male and female, and,
wishing to associate them

BIBLE READING

Acts 1-13

In your Bible reading this week,
from the Acts of the Apostles,
you will see how God called Paul
to devote himself
to spreading the good news
about Jesus.

Thus Paul became a model
of "Consecrated Life,"
the subject of next week's talk.

"The Church has always taught
the pre-eminence of perfect chastity
for the sake of the Kingdom,"
said Pope John Paul II in 1996,
at the end of the Vatican Synod
on consecrated life.

Marriage and the Family

Introduction

"The fundamental task of marriage and family is to be at the service of life."¹ God made humans male and female,² and, "wishing to associate them in a special way in His own creative work," told them to "be fertile and multiply."³ This is how He "increases" and "enriches" His family.⁴

We have already talked about the Sacrament of Matrimony. Now we want to focus on the family.

Today, many couples refuse to have more children because they think 1) a big family takes too much time and energy; 2) they cannot look after their family financially if it is too big; or 3) there are too many people in the world already.⁵

Father Vince and I are not competent to address the third reason, but in this talk, we will address the first two reasons for limiting a family's size.

My background

I have no children, but my parents had eight, and I am the eldest, 13 years older than the youngest. So I watched my parents bring up seven young children and, of course, experienced the same upbringing myself.

We all went to Mass every day — even the baby. Mother never went to the cry-room, but sat in the front pew with us, holding the youngest, while Dad looked after the next youngest. There was no crying, playing, or "talking in church" — except Mother's and Dad's whispers as they explained to "the little ones" what was going on. The rest of us followed it in our picture books or prayer books.

We all looked forward to our first Communions — with the family, not the school. "If receiving Communion is part of school life, a child might stop going to Communion when he leaves school," Dad said.

Mother and Dad would take us to visit the parish priest so that he could verify that we understood the difference between a wafer of flatbread and the Body of Christ. Then they would choose the big day for us: a feast of our Lady.

The girls wore a white dress and veil and the boys a white shirt, all made by Mother from her own wedding clothes. The boys wore a blue sash, for our Lady.

I remember how proud I felt when I could "make my thanksgiving" after Communion, with my head bowed on my hands, just like Mother and Dad! From then on, we celebrated our first Communion anniversaries as well as our birthdays.

At home, we played together, read, listened to music, worked on hobbies, and did our chores and homework. And we prayed. If we got hurt, Mother said, "Offer it up." If we wanted anything, she said, "Say a Hail Mary." If we heard a siren, she called, "Say a prayer for whoever it is." If a plane flew overhead, she murmured, "Please see them safely to their destination." When she put something in the oven, she said, "Please, our Lady, make it a success."

Every night there were family prayers, which included a request that God would "send us vocations in the family."⁶ I knew I was grown-up when I was first allowed to stay up for the whole Rosary, instead of just one decade!

"Innocent" children?

We were not saints. But there were no — literally *zero* — temper tantrums, "terrible two's," *etc.* We *never* refused to eat our food, go to bed, or do our chores. Mother and Dad *never* locked the cupboards or moved things out of our reach.

Instead, they gave us discipline, training, and education. They knew that we had

1 CCC 1652

2 Gn 1:27

3 Gn 1:28. See CCC 1652.

4 See CCC 1652.

5 Perhaps the so-called "vocations crisis" is really a "family crisis" (see Joseph Ratzinger: *The Salt of the Earth*, "The Canon of Criticism)."

6 One of my sisters joined the "Poor Clares" in Mission.

been born — in fact, conceived⁷ — subject to the effects of original sin.⁸

(Ignorance of this fact "gives rise to serious errors in the areas of education, politics, social action, and morals."⁹)

Children are not born "innocent." *From conception*, we inherit a "fallen" nature. St. Augustine says that before he could speak, when he found that other people did not serve him, he "took it out on them by crying."¹⁰ Many of us can look back on instances of disobedience, lies, cruelty, bullying, unkindness, or theft. Some of us can remember bitter, prolonged rage when we were thwarted: bursts of passionate tears, black, Satanic resolves to kill or die rather than give in.¹¹

One of my sisters remembers hearing at church about the "innocence" of children and feeling, with a sense of desolation and abandonment, that the phrase did not apply to her, for she had already committed sins.

Because of the Fall, we must be trained to govern our passions, physical and psychological. Otherwise, we grow as we were conceived:¹² slaves to the pleasures of the senses, covetousness for earthly goods, and the desire for self-assertion.¹³

Parents must teach us

Children are not born innocent. They require training, and for this, parents have "the first responsibility."¹⁴ In fact, "the care and attention" with which parents "educate" their children "in the right use of their reason and freedom" is a profound expression of their "respect and affection" for them.¹⁵

All good parents take responsibility for their children's physical needs: food, shelter, clothing. As early as possible, they teach them to brush their teeth, wash their hands, comb their hair, eat wholesome foods, *etc.*

Many good parents also give them a "moral education,"¹⁶ "an education in the virtues,"¹⁷ which requires "self-denial, sound judgement, and self-mastery — the preconditions of all true freedom." For this, the home is "well suited."¹⁸

However, many good Catholic parents do not teach their children the faith, but leave them to find it and accept or reject it on their own. On the contrary, they should begin their children's "spiritual formation"¹⁹ — their "education in the faith" — in their "earliest years."²⁰ The home is where children learn best how "to subordinate the material and instinctual" to the "interior and spiritual."²¹

For example, parents should teach them to pray;²² "initiate" them "at an early age into the mysteries of the faith"; and "associate them from their tenderest years with the life of the Church,"²³ especially the Mass.

As the children grow, parents should select schools that will "help them in their task as Christian educators,"²⁴ but they should never forget that "family catechesis

7 See Ps 51:7.

8 See the talk on "Creation and the Fall."

9 CCC 407

10 "Little by little I perceived where I was, and I wished to make my wants known to those who could satisfy them. Yet I could not do so, because the wants were within me, while those outside could by no sensible means penetrate into my soul. When they would not obey me, either because they did not understand or because it would be harmful, I grew angry at older ones who were not subject to me and at children for not waiting on me, and I took it out on them by crying" (Augustine: *Confessions*, Book I, 6, 8).

11 See C.S. Lewis: *The Problem of Pain*, VI.

12 "As the twig is bent, the tree's inclined" (Alexander Pope: *Moral Essays, Epistle I, To Lord Cobham*).

13 See CCC 377.

14 See CCC 2223.

15 See CCC 2228.

16 CCC 2221

17 See the talk on "Virtue."

18 CCC 2223. "May Nazareth teach us what family life is, its communion of love, its austere and simple beauty, and its sacred and inviolable character; may it teach us how sweet and irreplaceable is its training, how fundamental and incomparable its role on the social plane" (Pope Paul VI: *Address at the Basilica of the Annunciation in Nazareth*, January 5 1964). See CCC 533.

19 CCC 2221

20 CCC 2226

21 CCC 2223

22 See CCC 2226.

23 CCC 2225. See the talk on "The Liturgical Year."

precedes, accompanies, and enriches other forms of instruction in the faith."²⁵

In all this, "parents have a grave responsibility" to give their children "good example,"²⁶ for, in practice, they teach them "to fulfil God's law" by showing that they themselves obey it.²⁷ At the same time, they "will be better able to guide and correct" their children if they know "how to acknowledge their own failings."²⁸

Prenatally

When should parents start educating a child? Dad's answer, often repeated, was, "You start training a child nine months before it's born."

He was not joking. A child starts learning at conception. Long before birth, he senses whether he is wanted, whether his mother is stressed or relaxed, and whether his parents love each other. He can communicate and he can feel pain and anxiety. It has been demonstrated that by the time he is born, he knows and recognizes his mother; he may even recognize music and his father's voice.

He has also accumulated memories. One of my sisters knew a man whose parents finally told him, when he became an adult, that he had had a twin who had died in the womb. His response was, "I always knew that I had lost a playmate."

Human life is "sacred" — "from the moment of conception and through all subsequent stages" — because it is "created in the image and likeness of God."

Accordingly, it is important for a child's education that his parents think of him, even in the womb, not as a "piece of property" to which they have a "right," not as a "means" of satisfying an "emotional need," not as "an idea or an abstraction," but as "a being who lives, who acts, who grows and develops" — a "unique and unrepeatable gift of God, with the right to a loving and united family"²⁹ who welcome him as a person. (In fact, that attitude must be *habitual* to spouses, for if their first reaction to him is disappointment, dismay, or rejection, *he will know*.)

From his conception, a child also has the right to know and love God. His parents can teach him even before birth, by saying prayers out loud with him, talking to him lovingly about God, and letting him hear the name "Jesus."

For example, Mother, when she was pregnant, would begin our family night prayers by tracing the sign of the cross on her abdomen.

Perinatally

Many parents do not realize how much a child learns in the womb; and, after his birth, they often try³⁰ to delay his education until he reaches the age of reason.

That is a mistake, said the ancient Greek philosophers. From birth, a child "must be trained to feel pleasure, liking, disgust, and hatred" at things "which really are pleasant, likable, disgusting, and hateful."³¹ Then, when he can understand, he will easily assimilate the reasons; otherwise he will not even be able to perceive them.³²

For example, Mother taught us to speak perfect English as soon as we could speak at all.³³ Then, when I learned grammar and syntax in school, I loved them. My new knowledge did not change the way I spoke, but vindicated it.

Mother also taught us girls modesty long before we could understand the reasons. "Sit with your legs together." "Don't lie on the floor." "Walk purposefully; don't dawdle." As we reached puberty, we realized why. Again, we did not have to change our habits; they simply became more solidly and firmly based.

To a child who has not been taught good habits,³⁴ the age of reason brings

24 CCC 2229

25 CCC 2226

26 CCC 2223

27 See CCC 2222.

28 CCC 2223

29 Pope John Paul II: *Homily at Capitol Mall*, Washington DC, October 7 1979, 3, 4, 6

30 Children learn whether or not their parents are conscious of teaching them.

31 See Plato: *Laws*, 653.

32 C.S. Lewis: *The Abolition of Man*, I. See Aristotle: *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 2, Chapter 3, Section 2; and Plato: *Republic*, 402 A.

33 When one of us said, "I only want a sweet, Mummy," she replied, "No, dear, you want only a sweet."

startling changes in the "rules of the game" and the behaviour expected of him.³⁵

Since a child is conceived and born self-centered, "the older type of nurse or parent was quite right in thinking that the first step in education" was to teach him that his wants — even his needs — do not come before everything else in the world. "If, now that we are grown up, we do not howl and stamp quite so much," it is partly because our elders started teaching us that fact right after our birth.³⁶

Very young babies make their wants known by body language: primarily crying. They cry when they are hungry, tired, uncomfortable, bored, frightened, or ill.³⁷

Now many parents assume without question that they must stop a baby's crying at all costs, even if it means walking the floor with him from dusk to dawn — thus confirming his tendency to put himself first.

The doctor who delivered me told Mother to feed me at 6 am and every four hours after that, *but not at 2 am*. "If you do, you won't be able to look after her or do anything else for the rest of the day," she said. "If she wakes at 2 am, give her water; pretty soon, she'll stop waking." With the other children, Mother said, she didn't give them even water; they soon started sleeping right through.

Consistency

Consistency is the key (within reason), especially with respect to the schedule of feeding, going to sleep, waking up, playing, *etc.*

"When you put her to bed, leave her there until it's time to get her up," one doctor told Mother. "Don't get her up to show her off to your friends, for example. If you're consistent, you'll have *no* discipline problems: absolutely *none*."

Consistency gives a baby a sense of security. He soon learns that he can trust his mother to satisfy his needs; he does not have to cry.

But what do you do if he does start crying?

Mother would check to see if there were something *really* wrong.³⁸ If not, she would put his cot in the bathroom — where he could not disturb the rest of the family — and *let him cry*. Otherwise, she said, he would learn that crying is the way to *dominate others* and *get what he wants*.

We have all seen examples. A child in a shopping cart grabs something from a shelf; his mother puts it back. Instantly he starts to cry — noisily. If nothing happens, his shrieks become louder. Finally, unable to stand the pressure, his mother gives in. "What can you do with them at that age?" she asks with a deprecatory smile. The answer is, "You should have done it long ago."

A mother must have the self-discipline to let her baby cry: to subordinate the immediate gratification of her mother-instinct to the ultimate good of her child.³⁹

"No; don't touch"

Parents can easily control a very small baby if they are consistent. However, before long, the child initiates new behaviour.

I can remember one of my siblings sitting on Mother's lap at dinner for the first time. Of course, he wanted to pull the tablecloth, touch the cutlery, *etc.* Mother gently retracted his hand, saying meaningfully and firmly, "No," or "Don't touch."

She repeated this until, finally, the child looked up at her questioningly as he stretched out his hand. At this point, she gave his hand a little tap — not a slap, not enough to make him cry, but not a caress, either — to give point to her words.

Eventually the child made the connection between Mother's words and the retraction of his hand. After a while, he did not even put his hand out.

34 Aristotle calls them "virtues" (see Aristotle: *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 2, Chapter 3, Section 2).

35 To see the ensuing turmoil, watch the movie *The Miracle Worker*, based on the true story, in which Annie Sullivan has to teach seven-year-old Helen Keller to behave like a human being instead of an animal.

36 C.S. Lewis: *The Problem of Pain*, VI

37 There are various lists.

38 She said you can tell from the kind of cry. For example, continuous crying might indicate intolerance for lactose and might need a doctor's diagnosis.

39 In fact, she will have to practice this virtue throughout his life.

Mother illustrated how well we learned such lessons in a story about me. I knew how to slide downstairs on my stomach, but now, at the age of about ten months, I was learning to walk down, facing forward, holding on to the banisters.

A neighbour dropped in, and as she and Mother, at the foot of the stairs, were talking about how well-behaved I was, Mother said, "All I have to say is 'don't touch' and she doesn't touch."

I was not following the conversation, but I did hear the words "Don't touch." Obediently, I took my hand from the banister and stood there swaying, trying not to fall. Mother saw, rushed upstairs, caught me, hugged me, and explained.⁴⁰

Trust

I cannot recall that incident, but I know I obeyed not through fear, but in trust.

If a child trusts his parents, they will not have to restrain him physically or remove things from his reach; their spoken command will be enough.

When my sister took her little daughter for her first shots, along with other toddlers and their mothers, the nurse injected the other children without warning. In contrast, my sister showed her child the needle and how it worked, and said, "This lady is a nurse. She is going to prick you with this needle. It's going to hurt, but it will do you good. It will stop you getting sick."

By the end of the clinic, all the other children were crying, and the nurse was amazed at how quietly my niece had taken it. She could not have understood what her mother said, but the tone of voice was enough to reassure her, and she knew that she could trust her mother.

Trust in our parents, I think, is what gave me and my siblings the confidence and courage we needed when we had to be "different" in order to do what was right.

Trust is what God asked of Adam and Eve when He told them not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, lest they die.⁴¹ It was only when they had stopped trusting Him that they began to fear Him.⁴²

* * * * *

Tell the truth

If a child is to trust his parents, they must always tell him the truth.

When my parents married, they agreed never to tell us anything that was not true, anything about which they would have to "backtrack" later. They might not always tell us the whole truth, but they would never tell us an untruth.⁴³

For example, until he was five, my oldest brother was the only boy in the family. One day he asked Dad why his body was different from his sisters'. "That's so we can tell you're a boy," Dad said.

It was not the whole truth — but it was a truth I believe to this day: that femininity and masculinity are soul-deep, not just skin-deep.

From the first, my parents said that a baby comes from God. (True.) Then they told us that God plants it as a seed inside Mother, where it lives and grows for about nine months. (True.) The father, they explained, "goes out to work" to support the family, so that the mother can stay home and look after the child. (True.)

Periodically, Mother would announce the great news that in about three months we were going to have a new baby.⁴⁴ However, it was not until I was ten that the sister next to me asked Mother how she knew when to start counting the months.

That night, Mother and Dad told my sister and me about the female cycle and sexual intercourse, thus revealing the rest of the truth about fatherhood.

We accepted it naturally. I remember my own reaction: "Of course! God *couldn't* have made fathers just to support mothers! There had to be more to it than that!"

40 In *The Miracle Worker*, when Helen Keller's parents take her back after Annie Sullivan has had her for just two weeks, Annie begs unsuccessfully for more time. "I have taught her 'No,'" she says sadly. "I would have liked to teach her 'Yes.'" Eventually she does, but "No" had to come first.

41 See Gn 2:16-17.

42 See Gn 3:8-9; CCC 399. Also see the talk on "Creation and the Fall."

43 When one of us asked what "adultery" was, Dad replied, "It's a sin that only adults can commit."

44 She said that nine months was too long for young children to wait.

Contrast this story, which a nun told my sister. Her parents had said that Kris Kringle brought the Christmas presents, but one day, when she was about four, she went into her parents' bedroom before Christmas, saw the presents under the bed, and realized that her parents had deceived her. Now she began to wonder whether they had deceived her about God. Perhaps He was just a story, too. And *there was nobody she could ask*. If she couldn't trust her parents, whom could she trust?

So one day, when her mother was out and her father was having lunch on his own, she tested him. "If he says grace when he thinks he's alone, I'll know he believes in God," she decided. "If not, I'll know that God is just make-believe, too."

She hid behind the dining-room door and watched her father through the space between the hinges. *And he said grace.*

My parents told us the *real* story of Christmas, and I know we found angels and shepherds and a birth in a stable just as exciting!

For one of my sisters, the biggest thrill of Christmas was hearing the familiar words in the Gospel⁴⁵ at church. For me, it was helping Dad build the nativity scene with the figures *his* father had displayed in the window of his barber shop.

Mother and Dad told us about the *real* Santa Claus — Saint Nicholas of Myra, who is said to have flung bags of gold anonymously into a poor house as dowries for the daughters.⁴⁶ We started praying to Saint Nicholas on his feastday, December 6, asking him to "help Mother and Dad get ready for Christmas."

To this day, my own Christmas decorations include what used to be a commercial "Santa Claus" that I have re-dressed as a bishop, with a white alb, a red mitre and cope, a gold crozier, and a leather bag containing gold coins, Saint Nicholas' symbol. Naturally, I stand him near the fireplace!

Turn off the media

You may wonder why I had not heard about sex until I was ten. The reason is that, from choice, my parents did not have TV, and there were no other "screens" in those days. Moreover, Mother did not, in general, let us play with other children. "I can discipline my own children," she explained; "I can't discipline other people's."

In 1999, the American Academy of Pediatrics ruled "no screens before age two." In 2016, that became "no screens under 18 months except live video chat."⁴⁷

Of course, the AAP is concerned solely with children's social development, which is sufficiently under attack from screens to cause grave alarm. But what about their spiritual development? With TV, radio, and screens, is there any silence⁴⁸ — any time for prayer? And is it even possible, nowadays, to find something children can watch or hear that does not either contradict or ignore the faith?

When sex and violence appear on TV, do parents turn it off, or do they continue watching, hoping that it will get better or pretending that it is all right "for adults"?

Parents whose children have left the Church often ask Father Vince where they went wrong. Of course, Father assures them that everyone has free will. However, he says, he often wonders whether the parents made the mistake of watching TV.⁴⁹

Children are difficult to hoodwink. If their parents teach them the Catholic faith but entertain themselves with normal TV programs, the children will perceive the contradiction. Gradually, they will realize which master their parents really serve,⁵⁰ and that will be the one whose message they absorb.

45 Lk 2:8-14

46 That was the origin of our custom of hanging up stockings.

47 For older children, the AAP claims, screens are all right if the child's caregiver is actively involved.

48 "May there return to us an appreciation of [silence,] this stupendous and indispensable spiritual condition, deafened as we are by so much tumult, so much noise, so many voices of our chaotic and frenzied modern life. O silence of Nazareth, teach us recollection, reflection, and eagerness to heed the good inspirations and words of true teachers; teach us the need and value of preparation, of study, of meditation, of interior life, of secret prayer seen by God alone" (Pope Paul VI: *Address at the Basilica of the Annunciation* in Nazareth January 5 1964).

49 Father Vince himself has not owned a TV since his ordination.

50 Christ warned that we cannot serve two masters (see Mt 6:24).

Parents do it best

"Parents have the first responsibility for the education of their children."⁵¹ In fact, "it is almost impossible to provide an adequate substitute." Their right and duty to train their children are "primordial and inalienable."⁵²

Spiritually, "the Sacrament of Marriage" gives parents the help they need "to respond with generosity to the gift of parenthood."⁵³ However, there are also physical, psychological, and social reasons why parents are best.

Parents are genetically similar to their children. Moreover, they have known and shared their children's lives since conception.

For example, Mother began teaching me to read when I was about four, starting with the alphabet and the sound made by each letter. She was standing at the kitchen sink,⁵⁴ and I was writing, when, suddenly, I realized that I could make the sound of the letter A on its own, but not the sound of B unless I added something.

I said, "Mother, A is different from B, isn't it?" and Mother replied, "Yes; we say that A is a vowel and B is a consonant."

Would any other teacher in the world have known what I was talking about? Mother said once that she always knew what her own children were thinking, but never what her adopted daughter was thinking.

And if Mother had not been there when I made my big discovery, would I ever have mentioned it — to anyone? I once heard a colleague excuse her absence from home every day on the grounds that she spent "quality time" with her children in the evenings — but can one *schedule* "quality time"?

One of the saddest sights in our society, I think, is a child with a "caregiver" who is holding his hand, but neither looking at him nor talking to him. It reminds me of Christ's distinction between a "hired hand" and "the good shepherd,"⁵⁵ or Scott Hahn's distinction between a "contract" and a "covenant."⁵⁶

Poverty is a blessing⁵⁷

So far, we have been considering the first reason for not having many children: the fact that very young children can be almost unbearable. But people did not find me and my siblings unbearable (in fact, people used to comment on our good behaviour!), and what my parents did, any parent can do.

Now let us consider the second reason for not having more children: that parents cannot afford them.

Dad was an accountant. Thanks be to God, he was never out of work, from the day he left school at age 14 until he retired. Even the ten days of our emigration from England to Canada were holidays owed him by his English employer. And the day we arrived in Vancouver, a priest who had known him during the war put him in touch with a man looking for an accountant.

Mother wanted seven children, like her own mother. From her marriage on, her career was her family — by choice, on purpose, with Dad's whole-hearted support. At home, she breast-fed the baby (from the breast, not the bottle), cooked, baked, sewed, knitted, hooked rugs, canned, and cleaned. She shopped at bazaars and thrift stores. If we asked for something, she said, "Let's see if we can make one," and helped us find what we needed. She read us stories, played with us, and taught us — both boys and girls — to talk, pray, read, sew, knit, sing, cook, bake, and count.⁵⁸ Dad taught us to read music, play the piano, and do elementary carpentry.

Mother taught us our prayers, but Dad taught us the catechism and explained what it meant. After he took us out of Catholic schools, when I was entering Grade

51 CCC 2223

52 CCC 2221

53 See Pope John Paul II: *Homily at Capitol Mall*, Washington DC, October 7 1979, 4. Also see CCC 2225.

54 I was so much smaller that when I picture it now, it looks about six feet high!

55 See Jn 10:11-14.

56 See Scott Hahn: *A Father Who Keeps His Promises*, 1, and the talk on "The History of Our Salvation."

57 See the talk on "The Beatitudes."

58 For her funeral, I sewed her shroud, read one of the Readings, and sang the Psalm, thrilled to think that

Nine, he taught us Religion, formally, as a subject.

Their work as parents was not proportional to the number of children, Mother said. It was when they had two that they were most busy. After that, the older children could help — more and more as they grew up.

My parents managed to rent and then buy a home, but there were no skiing, skating, or swimming lessons and no organized sports or expensive holidays. We just went to the nearest beach or took a ferry ride. Those who won scholarships went to university (the four oldest); the rest got jobs.

I was born ten months after my parents married. "If we had waited until we had a house and a car," Dad said once, "*you would know* that we had put you second."

Give them a brother or sister

The late Father Donald Neumann⁵⁹ used to boast that he was "responsible" for at least 20 and probably 30 children in the Vancouver Archdiocese.

"That's all I've been told of," he grinned. "There may be others."

That was in 1997. He explained that once a year, he gave a very convincing homily on the joys of big families, quoting Pope John Paul II.

"Decisions about the number of children and the sacrifices to be made for them must not be taken with a view of simply adding to comfort and preserving a peaceful existence," the Pope said.

"Reflecting upon this matter before God, with the graces drawn from the Sacrament [of Matrimony], and guided by the teaching of the Church, parents will remind themselves that it is certainly less serious to deny their children certain comforts or material advantages than to deprive them of the presence of brothers and sisters, who could help them to grow in humanity and to realize the beauty of life at all its ages and in all its variety."⁶⁰

"A brother or sister is the greatest gift you can give your children," Father Neumann said. "Frequently, especially at Baptisms, people tell me that my homilies have struck a chord. As a pastor, I see the happiness of the children in big families. They know how to give and take. I also see the sadness when the parents of an only child die; there's no one to share the grief."

I have heard about the difficulty of introducing a new baby into a family, especially for the youngest child, but I never saw it, for Mother would create a new role for that child in advance. "We're going to have a new baby," she would say. "At first, he won't be able to do anything for himself, so you'll have to help me look after him and teach him all the things you can do."⁶¹

New feminist revolution

At the beginning of the feminist revolution, it was tacitly assumed that "men's work" was more important and valuable than "women's work,"⁶² and women set out to prove that they could do "men's work" equally well.

Well, we *have* proved it! Now we need a revolution to prove that "women's work" is valuable and important — perhaps even more than men's.

"There is no doubt that the equal dignity and responsibility of men and women fully justify women's access to public functions," said Pope John Paul II.

"On the other hand, the true advancement of women requires that clear recognition be given to the value of their maternal and family role in comparison

she had taught me all these skills.

59 May 2 1948 - September 6 2003

60 See Pope John Paul II: *Homily at Capitol Mall*, Washington DC, October 7 1979, 5.

61 I remember her pointing out to my oldest brother that if the new baby were a boy, he could teach him to run, play football, build things with Meccano, etc. She succeeded so well that the older one asked, only a few weeks after his brother was born, "Is this all he can do?"

62 Before the Industrial Revolution, that included the spinning industry, the dyeing industry, the weaving industry, the catering industry, brewing and distilling, preserving, the pickling and bottling industry, all the bacon-curing, and (since in those days a man was often absent from home for months together on war or business) a very large share in the management of landed estates (Dorothy Sayers: *Unpopular Opinions*, "Are Women Human?").

with all other public roles and all other professions.

"Furthermore, these roles and professions should be harmoniously combined, if we wish the evolution of society and culture to be truly and fully human....

"The Church can and should help modern society by tirelessly insisting that the work of women in the home be recognized and respected by all in its irreplaceable value....

"Society must be structured in such a way that wives and mothers are not in practice compelled to work outside the home, and that their families can live and prosper in a dignified way even when they themselves devote their full time to their own families.

"Furthermore, the mentality which honours women more for their work outside the home than for their work within the family must be overcome. This requires that men should truly esteem and love women with total respect for their personal dignity, and that society should create and develop conditions favouring work in the home."⁶³

In Canada, that means change. At present, it seems, society actively *discourages* mothers from bringing up their own children!⁶⁴

Lack of trust

Does all this sound as though my family was perfect? *It was not.*

First, we were all — including Mother and Dad — fallen human beings; and even when our parents did their best, we did not always trust them. Then they had to rely on punishment.⁶⁵

Second, things changed when we adopted my sister: a two-year-old who came between the fourth child and the fifth, then a baby.⁶⁶

From the beginning, we older ones could see that — quite understandably — my new sister did not trust our parents as we did. Accordingly, she had to be treated differently; fear had to take the place of trust.⁶⁷

We could also see how the three younger ones were affected. For example, they saw that obedience was not something *habitual*, as it was for us.⁶⁸ Accordingly, the younger ones had more decisions to make for themselves and they became more vulnerable to influence from the secular world.

Dad said once that he would never have believed there was so much in heredity: not, I think, that he expected to see my adopted sister's heredity in action, but that he did not see her respond to her new environment as he had anticipated.

Years later, Mother said that she would advise couples to adopt at the end of a family, not in the middle.

However, "God makes all things work together for the good of those who have been called according to His decree."⁶⁹ In our family, we not only know it; we have seen it and are still seeing it. *Deo gratias!*⁷⁰

No; my family was not perfect. However, I think that the principles with which Mother and Dad started to raise their family were sound.

Unfair to children

I know a couple who believed that the only way to make young children behave

63 Pope St. John Paul II: *Familiaris Consortio*, 23

64 For example, if a couple place their children in daycare and both parents work outside the home, they can deduct the daycare charges from their taxable income. However, if the mother stays home to bring up her own children, her husband cannot deduct a proportionate amount from his taxable income.

65 I remember that once, when my oldest brother wanted to do something wrong, Mother said, "If you do, I'll have to punish you." My brother thought about it and then said, "All right, Mother; I'll do it and you can punish me." (I cannot remember the outcome!)

66 In later life, he always joked that he had been "bumped" to sixth place.

67 For the first time, I saw serious and prolonged disagreement between my parents. Was my new sister to be treated as "one of the family," in spite of her different background, as Mother thought? Or should she have allowances made for her, as Dad thought?

68 For example, she once told them that they did not *have* to go to Mass every day.

69 Rom 8:28

70 Latin for "Thanks be to God."

was by fear and constraint. Wanting to banish these factors from their children's lives, they resolved never to give them a command they could not understand. They assumed that once the children could understand, they would recognize and do the right thing on their own, so they let them choose what to eat, what to wear, when to go to bed, when to get up, what to watch on TV or Ipads, *etc.*

For example, in the lounge at the airport, the mother asked the four-year-old, who was playing with a toy, "Would you like to go to the gate now?"

"No!" the child said, and, as her mother became more insistent, she began to scream and run away. In the end, her father picked her up and carried her — thus showing her that her mother's *apparent* offer to let her decide *had not been genuine*.

At the age of eight, that same child began to suffer such severe anxiety attacks that her parents consulted a psychiatrist. The diagnosis was that her world had too few boundaries; she had no feeling of security. The recommendation was that her parents cut down on the choices they offered her.⁷¹

Quite simply, it is *unfair* to children to leave them too many decisions. Unless they are taught otherwise, they will choose — at least until they reach the age of reason — to gratify the pleasures of their senses, their covetousness for earthly goods, and their desire for self-assertion⁷² — and those choices will become *habits*.

That is, *humanly speaking*. Unless we utterly reject Him, God, Who gave His Son to save us from our "slavery to corruption," will give us "the glorious freedom of the children of God."⁷³

Conclusion

In summary, here is our "recipe" for parents:

- welcome children as persons and teach them about God *from their conception*.
- teach them to obey *from their birth*, even before they can understand the reasons.
- be consistent in their discipline and education.
- always tell them the truth, even if it is only partial.
- make decisions for them — fewer and fewer, of course, as they grow up.
- turn off the media.
- realize that no hired caregiver can take the place of a parent.
- put brothers or sisters for them ahead of material goods.

No recipe, of course, can *guarantee* success in bringing up children — that is, ensure that every member of the family ends up in Heaven.⁷⁴

We must not make Karl Marx's mistake. Marx showed the errors in the existing order, but "he forgot man and he forgot man's freedom," said Pope Benedict XVI. "He forgot that freedom always remains also freedom for evil."⁷⁵

In "the material sphere," each generation can make "incremental progress," he said. However, "in the field of ethical awareness and moral decision-making," "man's freedom is always new and he must always make his decisions anew."

Moral decisions "can never simply be made for us in advance by others — if that were the case, we would no longer be free. Freedom presupposes that in fundamental decisions, every person and every generation is a new beginning."⁷⁶

No matter how well their parents bring them up, children remain free to choose good or evil, Heaven or Hell; but parents should make it as easy as possible for them to choose Heaven.

71 Mother told us what to eat, what to wear, when to go to bed, when to get up, *etc.* I vividly remember the occasion when she allowed me to choose a dark brown pullover instead of the one she preferred — perhaps because I remember how proud I was when she told me later that, after all, she thought I had chosen right!

72 See CCC 377.

73 Rom 8:21

74 More than once, my father stopped in the middle of family prayers and said, "Wouldn't it be terrible if, on the last day (see Mt 25:31-46), one of us was missing?"

75 Pope Benedict XVI: *Spe Salvi*, 21

76 Pope Benedict XVI: *Spe Salvi*, 24

Appendix 1: Family Planning, the Natural Way

John Billings, AM, KCSG, FRCP, FRACP (March 5 1918 - April 1 2007) and his wife Evelyn Livingston Billings, AM, DCSG (née Thomas; February 8 1918 - February 16 2013) were Australian physicians who pioneered the natural method of family planning known initially as the Ovulation Method, then the Ovulation Method Billings (specified by the World Health Organization in 1978), and finally as the Billings Ovulation Method.

Born in Melbourne, John Billings was educated at Xavier College and the University of Melbourne, where he received his Doctor of Medicine degree. In 1953, he began work on a method of family planning that involved observation of several indicators of fertility and infertility, gradually focusing on the changes to cervical mucus and the patterns of sensation.

His wife, Evelyn, became involved from 1963. The couple founded the World Organization of the Ovulation Method Billings (WOOMB) to teach the method throughout the world. Billings maintained his career as a consulting neurologist to St. Vincent's Hospital in Melbourne, but he and his wife spent a large part of each year travelling to other countries, training teachers in the Billings Ovulation Method, lecturing to doctors and students, and establishing teaching centres.

The Billings Ovulation Method, approved by the Catholic Church and used by the World Health Organization, was the only natural method accepted by the Chinese Government.

The Billings, who were in Vancouver in October 1987 at the invitation of Archbishop James Carney, were interviewed by *The BC Catholic*. The following article appeared in the paper's October 19-25 edition.

By Maureen T. Murphy

In the Teachers' Guide to the unit on sexual reproduction in the BC Science 10 Curriculum, there is a section entitled "Contraception: How well informed are you?"

It asks, "Do you know how the 10 main methods or devices for preventing conception work?"

There follows a list of birth control methods, including medical contraceptives, sterilization, barriers, and abortifacients such as the IUD and the "morning after" pill.

The only natural methods in the list are complete abstinence and what is described as the "rhythm method — taking body temperature every morning." The "failure rate" of the latter is given as 35 percent. (In fact, 35 percent is higher than the "failure" rate of the old "rhythm" method, which was based entirely on the calendar. "Taking body temperature" is part of the Sympto-Thermal Method, which, among pre-menopausal, non-breastfeeding women, has a 2 percent failure rate.)

There is no mention at all of the Billings Ovulation Method, independently tested by the World Health Organization in five countries — three of them "underdeveloped" — and practiced by 40 million couples worldwide. There is no hint of its 2 percent "failure" rate, its complete freedom from medical and psychological complications, or the ease with which it can be learned and practised.

The ignorance thus displayed by the author of the unit, himself presumably a science teacher, is part of the widespread ignorance about natural family planning which Drs. Evelyn and John Billings combat for six months out of every twelve, as they travel the world teaching and explaining the method.

Pregnancy not a disease

Perhaps it is just as well that the BC Teachers' Guide omits it, for the Billings Ovulation Method of natural family planning is not a method of contraception. Nor do the Billings regard every pregnancy as a "failure."

The Billings Ovulation Method is a method of pinpointing with remarkable

accuracy the days of the cycle on which a woman is fertile, the days on which she can conceive a child.

For about five days, the mucus noticed routinely by every woman, without internal examination — "without," as Dr. Lyn Billings says, "doing anything she has not done before" — has a different character. It feels more slippery and it looks clearer, more like egg white.

This is the mucus without which sperm cannot travel up the vagina and through the cervix into the uterus to reach the ovum. (It is the fertilization of the ovum by the sperm that produces an embryo, a new human being.) It is only in this mucus that the sperm can be preserved until ovulation, when the ovum becomes available for fertilization. When this mucus is present, therefore, intercourse normally results in pregnancy. When it is not, conception cannot occur.

"There have been references to this kind of mucus in the scientific literature for over a hundred years," said Dr. John Billings. "All we have done is to confirm scientifically that it is, indeed, necessary for conception and to determine its role in the process."

"Nevertheless, we didn't make much headway teaching women how to use it as a sign of fertility until Lyn joined us. Then our problems seemed to disappear," he chuckled.

Anyone can learn

The method is so easy to use that anyone can learn it. In fact, people in so-called "underdeveloped" countries learn it even more easily than others, perhaps because they are closer to nature and natural processes.

It is so successful in India that the government, even with its active birth control program and its promotion of sterilization, refrains from acting against anyone who claims to be using it.

"The authorities in Pakistan, who want to put curbs on the national birth rate, have been pushing the Pill," said Dr. John Billings. "But the last time we were there, they admitted to us that they weren't having much success. No matter how they try to convince the people that the Pill is safe, the people know it isn't true and they won't use it."

The Billings have visited 75 countries in Europe, Africa, North and South America, and Asia. One of them is China, where concern about the population has prompted forced, late-term abortions and compulsory sterilizations for couples having more than one or two children.

"They're interested in the Ovulation Method, too," said Dr. John. "They've told us frankly that they're not happy with the methods they're using. In fact, I don't know any expert who is."

Dr. John, a neurologist, began to observe as long as 30 years ago the problems associated with medical contraceptives. "Against my advice," he said, "couples would decide to use some artificial contraceptive. Within a few months, at least one in three would be back in my office, this time with a serious marital problem.

"The woman would be suffering from the side effects of the medication, such as a diminishment of sexual desire, and from a feeling of being used, of being there just to satisfy the man's desire. Often one or both of the partners would have been unfaithful to the other. Communication would have broken down, as the woman tried to hide her feelings and the man began to look elsewhere for satisfaction.

"Their reaction would be 'There's got to be a better way.' And those are just the ones who came back. Many of the others just separated and got a divorce."

Gift must be total

"You see," said Dr. Lyn, "the gift of oneself in marriage has to be total, including one's fertility. When that part of the gift is held back, or when it is offered and refused, resentment builds up.

"For the woman, particularly, this gift is great. Because intercourse, for her,

always involves the possibility of a child, however remote. It involves the offer of her body to carry the child. And for that offer to be refused is the worst thing that can happen to a woman."

"If a man understood the relationship properly," said Dr. John, "he would realize that when his wife is 'contraceptive,' so to speak, she is refusing the gift of his child."

Dr. John got involved in natural family planning when a young priest in Melbourne Australia, Father Maurice Caterinich, asked him to help find a way of planning families naturally. What attracted him to Dr. Billings, says Fr. Caterinich, is that he was happily married and fond of children. Also he had heard him say that "good morals make good medicine."

Dr. John got "hooked," he says, by the "goodness" of the people the priest was working with, people who had been told by the doctor that they should not have another child and who resisted contraception because they knew it was wrong.

Good morals, good medicine

But the effects of the Billings Ovulation Method are not just medical. Nor are they just moral.

The effects on a shaky marriage of starting to use natural family planning are nothing short of miraculous, says Dr. Lyn Billings.

"Marriages which seem to be dead are resurrected," she said. "Communication improves, because natural family planning necessitates it. The woman gains a new sense of self-worth now that she is no longer expected to dose herself with medications to make herself universally available to her husband. The husband gains a new respect for his wife. He himself finds out what he is capable of: that although he loves his wife sexually, he loves her enough to abstain from sexual relations if it is necessary to postpone pregnancy."

"People sometimes wonder if, for example, a husband with an alcohol problem can exercise this much control," said Dr. John. "What they suggest instead is really that the wife should take medication because of his problem and then be offered — served up — to him whenever he feels like it.

"But the surprising thing is that a husband in this situation begins to find out what he is capable of. And then he begins to realize that, if he can control himself in one respect, why should he not be able to control his drinking too?"

"This isn't speculation. We've seen it happen. Husbands and wives gain a new respect not only for each other but for themselves too."

"In fact," said Dr. Lyn, "a rise in the status of women is almost immediately noticeable in areas where people start using natural family planning."

And, of course, since the Billings Ovulation Method involves nothing more than knowledge of the time when a couple are fertile, it can be used to achieve pregnancy as well as to avoid it.

"Our record is 23 years," said Dr. Lyn. "One couple had been trying to have a child without success for 23 years. Once they learned the ovulation method, the woman conceived in the first month."

"Children are a natural part of a marriage," she said. "Our entire teaching program emphasizes the positive side of fertility. Married couples are pro-creators. We co-operate with the work of the Creator. When a husband and wife have intercourse, whether they are fertile or infertile, they are furthering the Creator's intention for human life. If they do so with full knowledge of their fertility, they co-operate in a more fully human way."

A woman's right

"A woman has a right to understand her fertility, to know what is happening in her body," said Dr. John. "Some couples come to me with the attitude that their fertility is a disease, the main problem they have to overcome in their marriage.

"But after they begin practicing the ovulation method, they come to terms with

their fertility. They stop being afraid of it."

"Once they know that control is in their hands, they often change their minds and decide to have a child."

"Yes," smiled Dr. Lyn. "Sometimes our teachers come to us and ask us whether they should really teach the method to people who utterly refuse ever to have children, even though that is so foreign to the very idea of marriage.

"I tell them to go ahead and teach them anyway, because I know that eventually they will change their minds.

"You might almost say that with our emphasis on the positive, the idea of a child is always there when they are fertile. And they just can't resist that child."

Dr. John tells of his experiences at a conference on population control in West Germany.

"They used to talk about the Pill formula," he explained. "They put 100 women on the Pill at the beginning of a year and at the end of the year they counted how many were pregnant.

"But they've begun to realize that their statistics aren't quite accurate, because if you put 100 women on the Pill at the beginning of the year, about half of them will stop before the year is up because of the side effects.

"So now they've started talking about the corrected Pill formula, which counts only the women who stay on the Pill for a year.

"However, some people have begun to realize that they have to talk about a corrected formula for our method, too. Because if 100 couples start using it to avoid pregnancy at the beginning of a year, quite a few of them will use it to get pregnant, because they've changed their minds about having a child.

"They've come to terms with their own fertility. They've started to co-operate with each other, with nature, and with God the Creator. They've gained the self-confidence and mutual trust necessary to bring up a child."

Spreading the word

If the Billings Ovulation Method is so successful, why isn't it better known? Why isn't the BC Teachers' Guide including it in its list of family planning methods?

"One reason is undoubtedly commercial," said Dr. John. "There isn't any money for anyone in it.

"And another reason is male chauvinism. Male doctors often just can't believe that women have enough intelligence to understand their own cycle and use their knowledge effectively.

"And a third reason is that women don't give their husbands credit for loving them enough to abstain from intercourse for a few days."

"But we're gradually eliminating the ignorance. The breakthrough came, I think, with the independent study done by the World Health Organization,¹ proving that anybody can learn and practise the method."

"An African woman walked up to me once and said simply, 'This method means love.'"

Good morals make good medicine.

Note: Dr. Lyn said that natural family planning "necessitates" communication between husband and wife. "Natural regulation" does not mean "respect for biological rhythm alone," said Pope John Paul II. "It is only in the context of complete and limitless reciprocal love by the married couple that the act of procreation ... can be carried out in all of its dignity."² In particular, a wife cannot keep to herself the awareness of the couple's fertility, leaving her husband ignorant of the appropriateness of sexual intercourse with her at any given time. Rather, this awareness must be part of their "complete and limitless reciprocal love."

¹ See the World Health Organization: *Natural Family Planning, "A Guide to Provision of Services,"* 1988.

² Pope John Paul II: *Message on the Occasion of the International Convention on Natural Regulation of Fertility and Culture of Life,* January 28 2004

Appendix 2: Cultural Value of NFP

This paper was presented on behalf of Dr. Evelyn Billings at the Pontifical Lateran University, May 9 2008, during a Congress to celebrate the 40th Anniversary of Pope Paul VI's *Humanae Vitae*. Here it has been edited for clarity and brevity.

By Evelyn L. Billings

When John and I began to teach outside Australia in 1969, the Billings Ovulation Method of natural fertility regulation had been fully verified by science, but we had much to learn about teaching and much to observe about its value to individuals, marriages, and the wider culture. Gradually, we saw attitudes change from the contraceptive "no babies" of Planned Parenthood to the welcome of children in full understanding of the Method, whose rules mean what they say.

This Method can be used by any woman anywhere, regardless of culture, religion, and status. Every fertile woman can be taught to recognize the signs of her fertility and every couple can apply four simple rules to manage their fertility naturally, whether to achieve or to avoid pregnancy. Its greatest attribute is its simplicity: blind women are successfully using and teaching it.

The ongoing scientific work of Professor James Brown of Melbourne and Professor Erik Odeblad of Sweden, which validate our clinical studies, was of invaluable assistance. Our Method monitored reproductive health, and we came to value the woman's medical records as a diagnostic tool, especially where chemical contraception had ceased and there were no other remediable abnormalities. This diagnostic aspect has been particularly useful in the alleviation of sub-fertility, with successful results exceeding those of modern assisted reproductive technologies.

In our early travels, we were warned that doors would be closed to us if we talked about family planning, as people were being offended and harmed by birth control programs, so we talked about our children, and the barriers fell away. The people responded readily to the Method and our teaching became simpler. We were confident, for the truth had been proved scientifically, and we soon realized that a couple needed only a simple instruction to grasp this truth and apply the knowledge.

'This method is love'

The early trials were performed in the Pacific Islands and by the World Health Organization, with excellent results. The biological pregnancy rate was uniformly low. The total pregnancy rate reflected the choices the people themselves made, and we always maintained that these choices should be in the hands of the couple, in the full knowledge of the Method. As Pope Paul VI says about responsible parenthood, parents must recognize fully "their own duties toward God, toward themselves, toward the family and toward society in a correct hierarchy of values."¹ At that time, this was not acknowledged by people who regarded any pregnancy as a failure.

After a talk some time ago, a woman said to John, "This method is love." She is right. It strengthens love by its gentle discipline. Intrinsic to it are truth and love, and its goodness works in the lives of couples and ultimately their community.

Initiated by the Method's essential ingredient — namely the need for the husband to understand his wife's reproductive physiology — all communication between them is enhanced. It is the beginning of co-operation with nature and with each other, and this is beneficial to their marriage relationship. In the early 70s we saw this happen in a Kenyan community where families were large and poverty acute.

Respecting culture

The introduction of radio and television to Africa made it possible to advertise birth control programs and introduce relief programs that were tied to propaganda about lowering the birth rate.

Many times, we heard that the people's culture had been well regulated by their own customs of abstinence, which preserved fidelity and family structures. After a child was born, it was common practice for the husband to move to another house while the mother breast-fed the baby. Then, when the child was two years old and could talk, he was sent off with a gift to invite his father home.

¹ Pope Paul VI: *Humanae Vitae*, 10

But the practices introduced by Planned Parenthood and like organizations have destroyed this fidelity, persuading the man and his wife that they did not have to put up with abstinence. This had dire effects, of which we know so much. However, knowledge and truth empower people. When the couple are given information about the Method, and unnecessary abstinence is removed, they can resume a healthy and happy life together.

HIV/AIDS has ravaged African families, but there are areas where the story is good. Instead of orphaned children parented by one old grandmother, we see families of three and four who are living happily with both a mother and a father who have been taught the Method by dedicated and accredited teachers.

On a return visit to Malawi 11 years ago, a country where HIV/AIDS was rife, we saw the fruits of the work of a mission sister who had taught the Method to couples. The mothers were respected and the fathers worked to support them.

The Method fits easily into every culture, even in the worst social conditions. HIV/AIDS remains incurable, but in southern Tanzania a German doctor, a sister, has had great success treating, teaching, and curing men with sexually transmitted infections. She teaches their wives the Method, so that when the husbands come home, they can live a healthy and happy life, protected from re-infection by fidelity.

Living the Natural Law once more, people have returned to harmony within their families and neighbourhoods. One African, an Animist, said, "I used to beat my wife, but now I love her. Something wonderful is happening in my country."

India

Early in our teaching, in the poverty of Calcutta's crowded slums, we met women who had been taught the Method by Mother Teresa's nuns — in the face of strong governmental enticement and coercion, but in conformity with the Church's Magisterium, which "does not ... cease to proclaim with humble firmness the entire moral law, both natural and evangelical."²

To condone contraception, sterilization, and abortion out of false compassion for people's poverty is to damage the stronghold of their union and introduce the worst poverty of all: the absence of love, of which Mother Teresa of Calcutta often spoke. Pope Paul VI, too, warned that such programs erode conjugal life.³

Throughout the world, in places where the Method gives people a reliable way of resisting the imposition of artificial birth control, there is a strength which can say to government authorities, "There is a better way. Keep away from our people. Do not harm our women." The people are happy.

Latin America

Catholicism is deeply embedded in the culture of the Latin Americas, but in El Salvador, in the early 1970s, families were large and unsupportable because of severe poverty, and the Church was finding it difficult to combat contraception, even though the anti-life, contraceptive mentality ran counter to the Church's teaching and the clash brought much disquiet to consciences. Church attendance was low; children were unbaptized and moved from family to family.

Then the Method came to El Salvador through three American missionaries, and they saw a change. They took their teaching into the homes; the people saw that their Church cared, and they responded by coming to church, getting married, and having the children baptized. As these children grew to adulthood, some became priests and religious. The whole community, centered on the church, became strong.

When the problem of fertility regulation, which had been acute, was solved, as it was in El Salvador at that time, a cultural healing took place. A Mexican priest recently told us, "I no longer have difficulty in the confessional with the problem of fertility regulation. I simply recommend an accredited centre for teaching." We experienced these very encouraging signs in the early days before the World Health Organization (WHO) trials.

Philippines

Similar changes were seen in the Philippines and elsewhere in the Christian world, where great damage was being done to families by birth control programs, but Church communities were restored and rebuilt by the Method programs.

Our programs in the Philippines are showing the success of good teaching by dedicated

² Pope Paul VI: *Humanae Vitae*, 18

³ Pope Paul VI: *Humanae Vitae*, 17

people. Our teachers are working with the poor, street vendors, fishing communities, jail inmates, and those living in dumpsites and other depressed areas. They report improved couple communication and relationships.

One woman stated: "I was about to leave my husband, but when we learned this Method, he loves me more. He learned to respect my fertility. He learned to abstain, which before he could not. We are now talking to each other."

Other women confided that they can now take Holy Communion because they are no longer using contraceptives. Another couple believes it was the Method that saved their marriage and helped them to realize the presence of God.

As has been the case in all societies where the Method has been taught, the change in the woman — from servitude to respect by her partner — has come about through the practice of the Method itself. Inherent in the Method is the loving discipline which is obedience to the Natural Law, when men and women live a more generous life together, no matter what their creed or belief.

'Simple and practical'

A recent communication from an accredited Pakistani teacher of the Ba'hai faith states, "The Method is so simple and practical that you can teach it at any time, in any place — during travel, in social gatherings, at informal meetings, and in intervals between workshops. I enthusiastically teach this Method.... When one is following the rules of nature he/she can feel a deep peace within."

This teacher, teaching mainly Muslims, expresses the sentiments of *Humanae Vitae*:⁴ couples "conform their activity to the creative activity of God" — an elegant way of saying "follow the rules." Inherent in the Method is the development of a dynamic power regulating the marriage from within the Creator's plan. Gradually, the Method is overcoming challenges and replacing male domination with husband-wife co-operation. Couples are coming together to be instructed and both men and women are actively involved in the teaching of new couples.

In Lesotho, a small land-locked country in South Africa, the men all wanted to be chiefs. Their role changed when they began to realize that it was the women who had the knowledge about their fertility. The men listened to their wives and became more co-operative in marriage; the result was improved social harmony.

When Indonesian women were asked whether there would be any difficulty in informing the men about fertility, they replied, "If we know, we can make sure they know." The men had some misgivings about women's having all the knowledge, and so they were keen to learn. Taken into their culture, the Method again effected an important cultural change by the men's simply listening to their wives.

Pope John Paul II said often that the development of society passes by way of the family,⁵ as we see in any culture where the Method is introduced. He also spoke of truth and love. For this reason, we are adamant that the Method be taught in conformity with scientific findings — taught authentically, without variation. Couples are entitled to the truth as much as to the exercise of their free will.

The blessings of truth are always apparent to teachers of the Method. In January of this year, we began a teaching program in Vietnam. In preparing this paper we received the glad news of two new pregnancies achieved by couples who had suffered from the pain of infertility: one for 17 years and the other for eight years.

China

Since 1995 we have devoted much time to teaching in China. We have visited there more than 20 times in company with senior teachers from the Education Committee of WOOMB International,⁶ accompanied on each occasion by dedicated teacher/translators from Caritas in Hong Kong.

Our travels began in China in 1986 when we were invited by the Chinese Ministry of Health. Their main concern was the burgeoning population and the unpopularity of their solutions, which were causing huge cultural change in families and problems for the government by the increasing age of the population, the scarcity of young people to care for the old, the unnatural

4 10

5 "The future of humanity passes by way of the family" (Pope John Paul II: Address to the Confederation of Family Advisory Bureaus of Christian Inspiration November 29 1980, 3-4; *Familiaris Consortio*, 75, 86; Address to the 4th World Meeting of Families in Manila Philippines via satellite television January 26 2003).

6 World Organization of the Ovulation Method Billings

ratio of boys to girls, women's infertility and damage to their reproductive health, and non-compliance with the regulations, particularly in remote areas.

The Ministry made some exceptions to the one-child policy — *e.g.* for low-population ethnic groups and families where the father had a dangerous occupation — but they used coercive measures as well. After exploring all alternative birth regulation strategies, they decided to invite us to teach the Method. We felt challenged, knowing the government's abortion policy, but we accepted confidently.

We were asked, "What will you do if a woman becomes pregnant? Abort her pregnancy?" We answered, "The Method has nothing to do with abortion. If the intention is to avoid pregnancy, and if the rules are applied correctly, there will be no pregnancy in 99.9% of cases. However, the choice is free. If, as a matter of choice, conception does occur, then this baby must be accepted and nurtured as we ourselves have been acknowledged and protected."

In China, the IUD had long been the chief means of birth control, and when we introduced the Method, doctors in charge of birth control were skeptical. The IUD is an abortifacient — it targets the implanting *conceptus*. We suggested that they teach the Method to the couples who were being given IUDs, pointing out that the avoidance of genital contact on recognized days of fertility — part of the Method's rules for avoiding conception — meant that there was no *conceptus* to be destroyed.

Subsequent statistics showed a greatly reduced pregnancy rate. The abortion rate has dropped sevenfold in areas where instruction in the Method is available. When the couple relied on the Method alone, it fell to close to one percent. And doctors have acknowledged that when IUDs are removed, women no longer suffer the pain, bleeding, and infection they caused. Gone are the visits to the hated "service stations" for mandatory abortions and IUD fittings; gone is women's resentment against doctor, state, and husband for the pain and grief of the insults they endured. Couples who use the Method are united in knowledgeable independence, which enables them to manage this most private part of their lives together.

Through the Caritas Hong Kong teachers, the Method has now spread into the large Catholic communities of mainland China, many of which are very poor. Huge numbers are embracing the Method; they themselves are being trained to teach it and spreading it to other Catholic groups, as far away as Inner Mongolia.

The Chinese Government is happy about this development, as these communities had resisted pressure to reduce the size of their families. The Catholic faith is central to their lives, and large numbers of priests and nuns have embraced the Method, helping married couples live their lives in fidelity to Church teaching. The Method is also being taught to engaged couples so that they enter married life with knowledge which enables them to manage their fertility naturally.

Truth and love

Pope Paul VI spoke of the "totality" of love.⁷ The misery has left the faces of Chinese women, as they live obedient to Natural Law, loving, trusting, and depending on their menfolk. Their husbands have learned to listen to them and co-operate with them as loyal protectors and real husbands. Now they "conform their activity to the creative intention of God, expressed in the very nature of marriage and of its acts, and manifested by the constant teaching of the Church."⁸

The change of man and woman together from this culture of death, where their children are routinely sacrificed in ignorance, to a well informed, healthy, and orderly self-regulated culture of life, is a great joy to all involved. The Chinese people have readily accepted the natural regulation of fertility and its philosophy.

Teachers of the Method are trained to impart truth and love to all alike. This is the essence of the Method, which leads couples to live in health and happiness.

The Method has benefited large populations and, in time, it effect social changes more widely still, reversing many of today's harmful trends.

Great optimism is spreading, through couples who teach their children and through organizations which train teachers to take this message of truth and love to the world. This is "truly a great work," "both for the world and for the Church, since man cannot find true happiness — towards which he aspires with all his being — except by respecting the laws written by God in his very nature, laws which he must observe with intelligence and love."⁹

⁷ *Humanae Vitae*, 9

⁸ Pope Paul VI: *Humanae Vitae*, 10

⁹ Pope Paul VI: *Humanae Vitae*, 31