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"For Men of Our Time . . . "

by

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Pope Paul VI, the author of *Humanae Vitae*, wrote in paragraph 12 of the document: "Men of our time, we think, are especially able to understand that this teaching is true." The teaching, as we know, states that if a couple separates the unitive meaning of the conjugal act from the procreative, the former becomes seriously damaged. If we keep in mind the subtleness of the psychological insight and the riches of various expressions of the subjective consciousness in men and women of our time, as well as their high intelligence, it is not difficult to share Paul VI's trust in their ability to grasp the subtle and sometimes even hidden aspects of human sexuality. The purpose of this article is to explore these dimensions of our sexuality, which are not thought much about in everyday life, although there is much evidence of their influence on most important decisions that we make. It is much like physics: the finest energies have the biggest force.

**Love and Lust: Incompatible Aspects**

Let us look at the relations between love and sexual desire first. In doing so we will turn our attention to the narratives of ancient cultures. Although these narratives are remote in time, they speak eloquently about the universal dimensions of human existence, something widely acknowledged. Folklore scientists note that many of these narratives tell of the dangers involved in the experience of the first night of the wedding. The most common story is about the death of the bridegroom on that night. If someone succeeded in avoiding such an outcome, it was only due to the aid of some helper. A saintly old man or faithful servant used to cast demons, or snakes or dragons out of the wedding room, thus liberating the bride from their possession. Only after this is a happy marital life possible.

A story of this kind is included in the book of Tobit in the Vulgate version, that fact confirming the significance of the symbolism. The bridegroom Tobias casts out the demon from the room of his wedding with the help of the angel Raphael. In this way, Tobias escapes death, unlike his seven predecessors who died during the November, 1994 37
first night of their marriage with Sarah. What is the meaning of these narratives?

We find an answer in what follows later in the book of Tobit. After the demon went away, Tobias invites his bride to pray and worship the Creator, praising His plan to join a man and a woman in marriage. “Then Tobias said. ‘And now, O Lord I take this sister of mine not for the gratification of lust, but for a noble purpose.’ Then she said with him ‘Amen.’ And both slept peacefully that night.”

(Tob. 8:7-9)

In the Vulgate translation of St. Jerome, the text described not one, but even three nights of continence! Tobias’ motivation for this discipline, so cruel in modern eyes, is that they — Sarah and he — are not heathens who do not know God and therefore join themselves only to satisfy lust. The purpose of the union between Tobias and Sarah is the conception of new life.

The meaning of the narrative is that of the dangers, as well as blessings, related to our sexual energy. There is a real possibility that we will be swallowed and killed spiritually by lust. This is a moral death, spoken about in the ancient texts. John Paul II’s profound inquiry into the meaning of human sexuality found in Genesis and in the teachings of Christ presents a revealing analysis of the relation between love and lust. While love is associated with the spouses’ mutual gift for each other through the masculinity of the husband and the femininity of the wife, a gift of oneself that is sincere, free and total, lust, on the other side, “and the lust of the body in particular—attacks precisely this sincere giving. It deprives man... of the dignity of giving, which is expressed by his body through femininity and masculinity, and in a way ‘depersonalizes’ man, making him an object ‘for the other.’ Instead of being ‘together with the other...’ man becomes an object for man: the female for the male and vice versa.”

So lust in itself is pure selfishness, a desire to use the other, but not to love.

The most evident examples of the moral and spiritual death caused by lust are those of sexual crimes. Although there is a big gap between these cruel manifestations of sexual energy and marital relations, it is quite evident that sexual selfishness can also enter the intimate life of spouses. In such a case a man uses his wife and a wife uses her husband, and it is difficult to speak of love between them. At best, it is a mutual satisfaction of sexual desire that they achieve.

What then are the spouses supposed to do? Does that mean that they should engage in love with “wooden faces?” If we pay serious attention to the words of John Paul II about the “nuptial meaning of the body” and recall that the sincere gift of oneself is expressed through the masculinity and the femininity of the body, it becomes clear that it is not so. Spontaneity and passion do not contradict true love, but on the contrary, are expressions of it. The satisfaction of sexual desire comes with it, but is not its direct purpose. This was the position of Christian classics.

Speaking practically, we must realize that both of these tendencies, i.e. a tender love toward the spouse as a sexual bodily person on the one side, and the lust of his or her body in order to satisfy one’s sexual appetites on the other, are inherent in each human being. Consequently, both of these two “vectors” are present in the subjective experiences of spouses engaged in conjugal intimacy. In the passion
of love, these two forces can be confused and at first, it can seem that one perhaps needs a computer with its rigoristic precision in order to extract these separate tendencies out of the overall natural feeling. Subsequently, following in the direction of love while "suppressing" the lustful selfishness can seem equally ascetic and otherwise unnatural. How could we answer such an objection?

First of all we must fully realize the presence of certain feelings which are inherent in us and which seek to protect our dignity from the utilitarianism of lust. These are the feelings of sexual modesty, shyness and shame. One does not need to make complex calculations in order to avoid lust in sexual intimacy; one needs only to not suppress the natural voice of sexual modesty. In fact, this feeling precedes lust. Attentiveness to this voice helps spouses prevent their sexual energy from falling into the root where it can be consumed by a desire for plain carnal satisfaction. It is superficial to look at sexual modesty as a restricting "agency". For even if it tends to exclude certain ways of behavior as incompatible with human dignity, it does not neglect sexual pleasure. It only impedes its isolation helping the spouses to not "get stuck" on the individual sensations, inviting them to the personal intimacy in sexual union. It helps the spouses in pursuing that kind of love, which is described by St. Ambrose when he speaks about the kiss: "Those who kiss one another are not content with the donation of their lips, but must breathe their very souls into the other."6

There is another reason why pursuing love instead of lust in conjugal intimacy is quite realistic. By their very nature love and lust are exclusive of each other: if one pursues love, lust fades away. This is a law of a natural hierarchy among the various energies in human personality: love and intellect, being the highest forces in human nature, have a regulating power over the realm of sensuality.7 Perhaps this is the reason why Karol Wojtyła in his book Love and Responsibility is able to say that loving tenderness, directed toward the spouse as a human being, "can temper the violent reaction of sensuality which is oriented towards the body and the uninhibited impulse of concupiscence."8 Paradoxical as it may seem, this tenderness helps the husband to practice the virtue of continence necessary in order to harmonize his sensual reactions with the slower and more gentle curve of a female sexual arousal of his wife, and indirectly this is a practice of the virtue of love in conjugal intimacy.9 If we remember what we said about the natural tendency toward sexual modesty, it becomes clear that by our very nature, we are ordained toward purity and humaneness in conjugal love.

The same laws of our nature apply perfectly to periodic continence in natural family planning. Those practicing it know that abstaining from sexual intercourse does not mean abstaining from love, for it is caring about a spouse's future. And it is exactly love and caring that make the sensual reactions not compulsive but submissive to the free decisions of the couple. If time for sexual intercourse is not appropriate at the moment, their personal intimacy is not broken, but easily finds other physical and spiritual ways of expression.

As any other quality of human character, lustfulness is not static, but can either grow or decline. No doubt, the first actual experiences of sexual intimacy are of paramount importance. It is not by chance that the symbolic death of the heroes in the ancient narratives is related to the first night of the wedding. It is like a

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turning point: one can take steps in the direction of integrating his sexuality into love or equally one can, as it were, throw all that excitement of the first intimacy into the mouth of the "dragon" of selfish lust. All the subsequent experiences of conjugal love — and probably each of them — can make a contribution either to developing lustfulness or to the humanization of the sexual impulses. In the latter case, spouses grow in conjugal chastity; this chastity means not some negative restrictions but making their sexuality blossom for love.

The Effects of Lustfulness

As we have seen when talking about conjugal love, lustfulness, being a product of selfishness and a utilitarian attitude toward the other, brings traces of disharmony and conflict into the area of intimate marital life itself. Alas, the effects of lust do not confine themselves only to this area. It is not by chance that the symbolism of ancient narratives speaks about the spiritual death of the heroes consumed by lust. While this way of thinking can seem to us perhaps too strict — at least at first — it surely contains deep insights into the nature of our sexuality. Let us look then more closely at these other effects of lust.

First of all, lustfulness makes somebody more susceptible to the attractions outside of marriage. The more one is lustful towards the body of his spouse, the greater sexual desire he will have toward all other sexually attractive "bodies," for if his sexual desires were not educated to be tied with love and self-giving toward the spouse, then they equally tend to react impersonally in situations outside the family. This tendency to be attracted sexually to the "body" apart from or in little relation to the whole person, is more characteristic of men. Nonetheless, lustfulness also has its place in women's susceptibility to attractions to other men. The difference in the susceptibility of men and women lies only in stronger focus on the psychological characteristics of the new "object" of interest. Having in mind the numerous contacts with men and women other than one's spouse in modern society, the dangers for stability of the family are evident. For even if the dynamics of "occurrence" of a foreign attraction cannot be totally reduced to its sexual component, it nevertheless seems clear that the lustfulness of personality plays an important role in responding positively to the physical or psychological charm of "new" people in this environment. The opposite is also true: the more chaste one is — and in marriage that means the directedness of one's sexuality toward the person of spouse — the greater is his or her resistance to the "foreign" attraction. It is simply that his or her eyes and feelings do not so easily "cling" to someone other than a spouse. Perhaps "eyes" are more important to men, while "feelings" are to women, but it is the heart of a chaste person which stays faithful to the spouse recognizing the illusionary character of the new erotic adventures.

The second effect of developing unchaste sexuality is an inability to solve psychological conflicts in marriage. This statement can seem rather strange at first, but the explanation of why it is true is quite simple: a tendency to use the other for one's sexual enjoyment does not remain limited to sexual relations only. Lust and greed are the expressions of a general utilitarian attitude toward people and the world, and if fostered in the powerful experiences of conjugal intimacy,
they have an influence on the ways our minds and emotions work in everyday life. Subtly and often unnoticeably, the attitude of selfishness permeates the whole field of relations between the spouses. This emotional selfishness makes one unable to put a necessary spiritual effort in the process of building up good communication and developing trust in marital relations.\footnote{12}

Perhaps the most explicit description of the influence of conjugal chastity on the basic psychological atmosphere in the family can be found in \textit{Humanae Vitae}, paragraph 21, dealing with Self-Mastery. One can rarely find a close examination of this section of the document, although the subtleness of Pope Paul’s insight into these mostly subconscious aspects of family life seems incredible. “Although [chastity] requires continuous effort, it also helps the spouses become strong in virtue and makes them rich with spiritual goods,” writes Paul VI. “This formation fosters the fruits of tranquility and peace in the home and helps in the solving of difficulties of other kinds. It aids spouses in becoming more tender with each other and more attentive to each other. It assists them in dispelling that inordinate self-love that is opposed to true charity.”

This delicate relationship between the character of one’s sexuality and his or her spiritual state in everyday life, it seems, can be fully grasped by the consciousness of today’s Christian couples. Undoubtedly, this was the belief of Pope Paul VI. Conjugal chastity contains in itself a tremendous resource for perfecting that part of our life, which is more influential to the well-being of the spouses, for the survival of the family and the formation of children than degrees, financial possibilities or public fame: it is … “the everyday routine.” It is exactly in this area of the everyday life that love and unity between spouses either grows or weakens, as if corroded by seemingly insignificant, but in reality very influential “small” cases of selfishness and disrespect. This informal environment of family life tends to bring to the “surface” these traits of our characters which usually remain subconscious. Much strength is contained in these depths, but many weaknesses also. Family life can be seen as a workshop in which these layers emerge into our awareness in order to be transformed in the light of love. And it is conjugal chastity that creates that atmosphere of caring and gives the necessary freshness of spirit for success in this creative process. The “routine” becomes transformed into cooperation in love.

So far we have discussed the two effects of lustfulness upon the well-being of the family. Not much insight is required in order to see how the susceptibility to attractions outside of marriage and the inability to solve difficulties in relations, naturally occurring in each family’s way to maturity, can lead to divorce. In fact, each of the family-weakening tendencies enhance another: the tensions in the family make one more eager to look for new “promising” relations, which, if they begin to appear, extinguish one’s readiness to put some necessary effort to search for constructive solutions at times of difficulties in the relations at home.

It, therefore, seems logical, that the boom of divorces in the 1960s and 1970s must somehow be related to the “liberation” of sexual desires. Perhaps nothing is new in this statement about the link between the sexual revolution and divorce, and we only examined the mechanism leading to the breakdown of the
relationship between the spouses when their sexuality begins to serve lust more than love. But something else coincided in time with this era of divorce and "liberated" sexuality: the wide availability of contraception after the discovery of the pill.

The Relationship of Conjugal Love to Life

Certainly not much insight is required to see how contraception gives a "safe" possibility for selfish satisfaction of sexual desires in cases of "free" love, premarital sex, etc. If every action has its symbolism relating it to some particular movement, then contraception is closely linked, if not invented for, the "sexual liberation movement." This is the kind of "liberation," which comes at the expense of one's ability to love.

We must agree that the use of contraception in marriage is a more subtle issue. For there are indeed couples who frankly believe that this is a good way to foster love in the family. They really think that contraception gives them the opportunity to engage in sexual intercourse without fear of conception and without the "restraints" of abstaining. Nonetheless, the possibility of expressing love in contracepted intercourse remains problematic. First of all, one can hardly argue that the "vector" of sexuality ordered to love weighs more than the sexual desire itself in the motives leading spouses to engage in a contracepted sexual act. For, as we have seen before, love has dominion over sexual desire and is free to abstain from conjugal intercourse when there are good reasons to do so. This period of abstaining actually makes love blossom, not wane. \(^\text{13}\) This dominion, which is necessary for the full sense of sincere giving of oneself in love, is not exercised by these spouses who use contraception; consequently, the vector of love in its true meaning is weakened. Secondly, even if there were some noble desires possessed by those who invented contraception, the ideas were largely repudiated by the culture of sexual lust, the expansion of which was made greatly possible by contraception. When using contraception, spouses seem to tap into the symbolism of sexual gratification, even if they want to remain free from lust. Moreover, we know that there are many couples who never bother themselves with such questions as the humanization of their sexuality, and it is contraception that gives them a possibility to gratify the sexual appetite as much as they want. They present us a sad example of how contraception enhances selfishness and other interior conditions which lead them to divorce.

There are even more serious aspects of contraception which damage the unitive quality of the conjugal act, however. They are related to what happens when conjugal intercourse is totally closed by free choice to the possibility of the beginning of a new life. A fundamental character of this matter calls for special attention.

In order to understand the meaning of contraception, we must formulate a question: what does one actually do, when he or she contracepts? Some would say that such a person behaves responsibly in order to avoid unwanted children when the situation of the family is not able to receive them adequately. Some would say that the contraceptive couples foster conjugal love, setting it free from
anxiety — and there could be other responses. However, these answers describe only the motive of why a woman takes a pill or uses another contraceptive device — and this applies to men equally — but they do not say anything about the content of this action itself. The latter can be formulated as follows: it closes one’s ability to bring new life into being.

A strict logical analysis of this act reveals that it involves a contralife will. Since Life is an unquestionable good of human existence, such a will is unilaterally immoral. But in modern times there is an explicit tendency to deny the absolute character of moral norms, by considering them more as relics of previous times and unreasonable restrictions. For this reason it seems that we can better understand contraception if we examine what it does to the person who uses it. For, as it was stressed in the Vatican Council II, the effects of every act affect both — the object of action and the subject of it — the doer.

So what does it mean to close oneself to the possibility of new life on a concrete evening, let’s say, Thursday night? How does that affect the one who is doing that?

Quite inevitably we must engage in a poetic kind of language in order to give an adequate response to this question. The reason for such a seemingly unexpected move for an article which does not try to fit into a category of aesthetics lies in our inability to grasp the true meaning of words, a rather blunt sense of reality — perhaps a result of our constant involvement in the feverish rhythms of urbanized life and other modern conditions. Consequently, the word “Life” is rarely grasped at its full meaning — it is a theoretical concept to us rather than something related to a vibrant mystery and source of all happiness we can have. Maybe this kind of language can help us restore a colorful vision. Even more so because philosophers themselves believe that art and poetry have a power to tell us about truth equally as eloquently as logical analysis itself.

So: Life is the ultimate tenderness. It is like a blossom of the first flower in spring: a supreme gentleness, freshness and joy. You can see this sign on the face of a woman who has just conceived. You can almost inhale it in the home filled with joy on a day when a newborn baby is brought into it.

Let’s ponder a little while on this meaning of life. If the reader is reading this text in a hurry, as usual in our day, it will be difficult for him or her to get in touch with what these words really mean: it is a matter of experience rather than information. We often must shake our tired heads and straighten our shoulders, bent by anxiety, in order to let “fresh air” into our consciousness.

How does all that pertain to conjugal love? This is quite simple: being open to life we participate in its qualities, we are as it were “tapped” into its features. That happens most strongly, when spouses have a definite intention to beget a child, perhaps to some degree weaker when they are not planning this, but it still occurs if they do not impeded their procreative abilities; the influence of openness to life is blocked when the fertility of spouses is canceled by contraception.

If our meditation on the influence of openness to life is to be totally realistic, we must note here the obvious fact, that any conjugal intimacy, provided it is not forced by one spouse upon another, involves pleasureable excitement and other positive emotions. Somebody perhaps would express doubts whether the

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described effects of participation in the meaning of life is so crucial to conjugal relationship. Surely, there is a certain sense in this argument: merely not using contraception does not automatically bestow gifts upon conjugal love. It is clear that somebody can exercise selfishness in intercourse that is not contracepted (and this also happens). The important point, however is that, as we have seen before, there is a crucial need to humanize our sexual energy. It is in this battle for the integration of sexuality into love, rather than just letting it slip into impersonal lustfulness, that this subtle, although powerful, influence of openness to life becomes really important. Devoid of this, spouses can easily find themselves under the dominion of desire to use each other than to love.20

This openness to life in conjugal love is closely related to what Karol Wojtyla calls the "existential character" of human sexuality. Being ready to receive a new life, "a man and a woman agree to take special part in the work of creation" — a continuous plan of God to bring new human beings to earth.21 In doing so the spouses step over the boundaries of enclosed self-enjoyment into a broader context of existence. Their love is deepened by this dimension, for it ceases to be merely a matter of pleasurable feelings: they jointly undertake a challenge of begetting and caring for new life. They accept this mission in which they commit themselves as sojourners, faithful helpers in this challenging path. Dangers of selfish enjoyment in conjugal intimacy are vigorously dissipated by this larger meaning and sense of community.22

In the face of profound changes in the society and consciousness of modern men, however, it is clear that spouses have a right to regulate the number of children in their family. Nevertheless, the duty not to impede the procreative abilities remains crucial for the unitive potential of conjugal intimacy and the overall development of family life. The only set of methods enabling spouses to meet this condition are those of Natural Family Planning (NFP). The high efficiency of these methods as well as their scientific reasonableness are proven, so even organizations like WHO, which usually show little evidence of sharing a Christian world view, have admitted that these methods really do work.23

But why are the methods of Natural Family Planning considered to be so different from contraception? Are they not just another "natural" form of it? Why is it that NFP is considered as being open to life, and thus providing an indispensable condition for integration of the sexual energy into love? Are not the spouses who use it also wanting not to conceive a child, as it is with contraception?

The answer to these questions is that NFP does not require the spouses to perform a concrete action directed against the possibility of a new human being coming into being. As we have seen before, this is indeed what one does when using a contraceptive device.24 That makes an important difference with respect to openness to life. It seems appropriate to use a metaphor here. Let's say that we have two couples who are having their meal, each in a separate home. The first couple are really enjoying their time together and they lock the door in order to prevent anybody from coming in. The other couple, at the same time, is also enjoying their meal, and they also did not invite anybody to join them, but the door of their house is not locked. If an unplanned visitor would come to their
home, he would be able to come in. It is not difficult to see how the condition of the door of the house affects the "color" of the relationship between the spouses. The spouses of this second house do not close their love to those other than themselves. Even if they do not have resources to invite a guest to their home, they made a generous commitment to accept him; if somebody would occasionally knock on their door they would share what they have. Probably nobody will come by, but the commitment remains real. Any generous act strengthens their spirits and unites them more strongly. While the first couple encounters the danger of group selfishness, which consists of each member's individual selfishness, and therefore weakens the very bond and love between the spouses. This seems to remain true even if the motive for locking the door is not some selfish enjoyment, but genuine anxiety of having not enough space and food for the unplanned guest. For it is one thing to save and not to invite somebody irresponsibly and another to deliberately plan not to share with anybody in any case.

It is probably clear that in this metaphor the first couple's behavior symbolizes the use of contraception, while the symbolism of the unlocked door is applicable to NFP. The two methods of regulating the size of the family involve two different attitudes to the possibility of a new life. And where there is respect — a respect for life itself — it is very rewarding, and uniting.

There remains one more important challenge for us modern men and women. It consists in an adequate understanding of the question of authority. In some sense most of us have a "syndrome" which in psychotherapy is called "compulsive independence". Western culture is trapped in this complex. It is common to teenagers, who rebel against all kinds of advice because they suspect that somebody wants to exercise power over them. Beginning probably with Kant or even earlier, liberal thought was unable to realize that authority can be of different kinds besides that based on plain power. There is an authority which comes from love and the ultimate respect for an individual. A real sign of an adult person is this ability to free oneself from the fear of parental figures and to be able to accept advice. The advice we are concerned with here is against breaking the unitive and procreative meaning of conjugal act. The Church does not want to exercise its power of being able to "rule its flock" with boring restrictions. On the contrary, it wants to help them attain the freedom which comes with the ability to integrate sexuality with love. As we have seen, this is an act of a subtle creativity in the realm of spirit. The author of *Humanae Vitae* was sure that we are really capable of this.

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5. St. Augustine, for example, condemned behavior aimed for satisfaction of sexual desire independently of reason and will. St. Thomas similarly “warned against pleasure seeking (not pleasure experiencing) in love (see the above-mentioned article of Cormac Burke in *Communio*, Winter 1990 p. 554 and the article of Fabian Parmisano, “Love and Marriage in the Middle Ages II” in *New Blackfriars* 80 (1969) p.659).


7. This is the thesis of the classical philosophy of Aristotle, reinterpreted by St. Thomas in his “Treatise on Man” in *Summa Theologica I*, Q 81, Art. 3.


10. It seems interesting to notice that the tradition of abstaining from conjugal intercourse on the first or more nights of the wedding is described not only in the Old Testament, but also in other religious traditions. For example, *triratrivraita* (abstaining for the first three nights) is the tradition cited in the Hindu holy scriptures. Folklore scientists report similar behavior still in use in our days in some remote parts of Northern Europe. See R. Bali Pandey *Hindu Samskaras* Motilal Banarsidas, Dehli 1976, P. 195. and D. M. Balashov *The Russian Wedding* Moscow 1985, p. 296. These examples help us to realize how highly the virtue of chastity is respected universally in human experience.

11. A more thorough analysis of the reasons why people outside of marriage seem often to have a special glamour in our perception would require a lengthy excursus on the psychology of marriage and of mutual attraction between spouses; although folk wisdom, as it frequently does, explain that briefly in a saying that “the grass is always greener on the other side…”

12. The concept of “sublimation” or “transformation” of sexual energy fits with this discussion. An Italian psychiatrist, R. Assagioli — one of the founders of a spiritual branch of psychotherapy — mentions numerous famous artists and scientists who lived chaste lives, and even gives direct examples of how the sexual passion was transformed into spiritual creativity with the result of beautiful opuses being born (the history of R. Wagner’s opera *Tristan and Isolde*). As the areas of human relations can equally be considered as one of the most subtle spheres of spiritual and psychological creativity, the sexual energy, not wasted in the lustful and selfish sexual relations, can be a large power in the successful building of marital communion. This transformation is a fruit of conjugal chastity, which includes both: the periodic abstinence at certain times and the “channeling” of sexual desires into self-giving love in the conjugal intimacy. See *Psychosynthesis* by Roberto Assagioli, Hobs, Dorman & Co., Inc., New York, 1965, p. 274.


14. These opinions can be found in the works of theologians such as Louis Janssens (see “Considerations on Humanae Vitae” in *Lowain Studies* 1969), Bernard Haring (“The Inseparability of the Unitive-Procreative Functions of the Marital Act” in *Contraception Authority and Dissent*, New York 1969), and others whose critique of *Humanae Vitae* contributed to the emergence of the well-argued defense of the encyclical in the works of Karol Wojtyla, Germain Grisez, William E. May, and others.

15. See G. Grisez’, J. Boyle’s, J. Finnis’ and W.E. May’s article “Open to the New Life…” in *The Thomist* 52.3, July 1988, p370. The authors use the strong term of “practical hatred” for describing the attitude toward the possible new human being coming to be, explaining that it is not necessarily emotional. While the word “hatred” can seem shocking to those spouses who believe in the goodness of contraception, because they never had a chance to examine it deeply enough, nevertheless it truly describes the neglect of a possible new person at the moment of taking a pill or similar contraceptive.

16. See “Gaudium et Spes”, #27.
17. A famous phenomenologist, Max Scheler used to criticize a bad use of intellect in our everyday life. He strongly advocated a refreshed perception of reality, which becomes possible when one leaves "the imprisonment of the intellect which turns toward what is merely mechanical and what can be mechanized" (see "The phenomenology of Essences: Max Scheler" in The Phenomenological Movement" by Herbert Spiegelberg, The Hague, 1965, p.240). Then we seem to regain the "colors" of the world and become capable of seeing and realizing again that various objects around us are not just inanimate "objects": for example there is a big difference in perceiving a tree as just an object standing there and realizing, becoming aware of what it really does to my environment and my emotional-spiritual condition.


19. This is explained by a self-determining character of free choice: we become what we are by what we choose to do (see An Introduction to Moral Theology by W.E. May, Our Sunday Visitor, Inc. p. 25). For example if I choose to look at a woman or even at my wife lustfully, I practice lustfulness and I become lustful. On the contrary if my wife and I choose freely to be open to life in conjugal love, we become bearers of life, therefore alive in our spirits; we constitute our characters with qualities of life: with gentleness, freshness, joy, tenderness ....

20. Although this explicit intention to integrate one's sexuality with love is crucial for getting in touch with that meaning of life, we cannot totally neglect its beneficial influence even when somebody doesn't perceive it consciously. For example, if somebody sees a real tree but thinks it is a plastic one (you can really confuse which is which at a modern mall), this misperception however does not change its realness nor its beneficial influence upon the environment; he, who sits at the bench under that tree receives its good influence upon the atmosphere around it independently of the fact that he is not aware of it. The issue seems similar to the influence of the Sacraments: in receiving them we are called first of all to personal and conscious relation with Christ and with the Holy Trinity through Him. The fact that a newborn baby is not capable of this kind of awareness does not negate the Sanctifying influence of the Sacrament of Baptism upon him, for "it is clear that the influence of the Spirit is not confined to those levels of consciousness we take to be signs of maturity" (cf. Colman E. O'Neil, O.P. Sacramental Realism, Michael Glazier, Inc., p. 212).


22. Karol Wojtyla aptly describes what happens to conjugal love when the possibility of parenthood is rejected: "If the possibility of parenthood is deliberately excluded from marital relations, the character of relationship between the partners automatically changes. The change is away from unification in love and in the direction of mutual, or rather, bilateral, "enjoyment" .... Their relationship is transformed to the point at which it becomes incompatible with the personalistic norm. When a man and a woman entirely reject the idea that he may become a father and she a mother ... the danger arises that objectively speaking there will be nothing left except "Utilization for pleasure", of which the object will be a person (idem, p. 228).

23. In a survey undertaken by the World Health Organization itself, the ability of women to recognize the signs of their fertile period was investigated in five centers of wide variety with respect to the cultural, economic, and educational backgrounds (Auckland, Bangalore, Dublin, Manila and San Miguel, El Salvador). (93% of the women regardless of culture and education were able to reliably interpret the signs of fertility, including El Salvador's women, 48.1% of whom were illiterate. The probability of conception from intercourse outside the period of fertility defined by cervical mucus observation was 0.004 (cf. British Medical Journal, vol 307, Sept, 1993).

24. In the above mentioned article of G. Grisez, J. Boyle, J. Finnis and W.E. May (p. 370) the authors prove that the act of contraception and the intercourse itself are separate, i.e. two different actions. It is most evident when the pill is taken or any other contraceptive device is applied, installed, etc. before or after sexual intercourse. Realizing this distinction helps us to avoid the mistaken impression of a noble character in contraception which may seem to pertain to it when it is confused with the conjugal act itself. Although the spouses, having not reflected on this, can genuinely believe that by using contraception they foster love in their marriage, this motivation doesn't change the content of the act of contraception itself, i.e. acting against life. The morally wrong character of the action doesn't change because of a noble purpose for which it is performed.

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