

## I. The Author, Title, & Event

Fr. Christopher M. Saliga, OP, RN, **Promotion of Holistic Health via Excellent Family Planning: A Catholic Perspective**, 1<sup>st</sup> Annual Meeting of The Society for Spirituality Theology & Health, 25-27 June 2008.

## II. Introduction

**Why** does the Roman Catholic Church choose not to endorse contraceptive sexual intercourse between spouses, even in cases in which there is “excellent medical rationale” for practicing contraceptive sexual intercourse?

**Because** spouses who freely engage in truly-integrative sexual intercourse strengthen their communion with each other and with God (spousal holistic health) while those who engage in contraceptive sexual intercourse *de facto* contravene both.

**In the final analysis**, given the fact that the human person is a holistic rather than dualistic being naturally inclined to progress in virtue *via* the God-given call to marriage as a particular path to sanctity, and in light of the moral object by which each well-integrated sexual act exists, non-contraceptive sexual and medical practices are rightly upheld and promoted within authentically-Catholic health care.

## III. Key Anthropological & Aretaic Presuppositions

The human person, no angel, is one whole body-soul composite. Thus, William May writes:

God in creating *human* persons, created bodily, sexual persons . . . [thus, in truly-integrated sexual intercourse] a man and a woman, in giving their bodies to one another,

give their persons to one another . . . [referred to by John Paul II as] the *nuptial meaning* of the body.<sup>1</sup>

Fully-integrated (holistically-healthy) sexual activity does not exist apart from virtue. But what is virtue? When virtue is spoken of meditatively rather than analytically, a sense mystery is beautifully maintained while high precision is sacrificed. For example, Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis in his consideration of C.S. Lewis's Four Loves, does not clearly distinguish between humans acting virtuously or viciously<sup>2</sup> as compared to continently or incontinently.<sup>3</sup> Such lack of precision leaves one at risk for

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<sup>1</sup> May, Catholic Bioethics And The Gift Of Human Life, 133. In support of this position, May cites Pope John Paul II, *Theology of the Body: Human Love in the Divine Plan* (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 1997), 60-63, 63-66, and 66-69.

<sup>2</sup> See Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, I-II, Q. 49.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, Q. 155, A. 1. Aquinas recognizes Aristotle's account of continence as something less than fully-mature virtue by paraphrasing Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* vii 7.1150a10: "Others, however, understand continence as signifying that whereby a man resists evil desires, which are vehement." Aristotle writes: "The person who is overcome by pleasures is incontinent; the one who overcomes is continent; the one overcome by pains is soft; the one who overcomes them is resistant." Within this article, Aquinas also demonstrates that if virtue is considered broadly as "any principle of commendable actions" then continence is rightly considered a virtue. Within this essay, I presuppose the term "continent" as indicative of persons who are en-route to full virtue but are not yet fully virtuous strictly speaking. I do this in order to cleanse the notion of virtue such that the virtuous person is seen beyond dis-integrated action. This helps the reader see the human person who is virtuous as God calls him to be—fully integrated in his acting—the human person as having realized a new level of God-made-possible holiness. This will enable me to consider something of the perfect holistic act of spousal love in order to appeal to the human tendency to freely choose ends under the aspect of the good. At the same time Leiva-Merikakis and C.S. Lewis will help me transform what might otherwise amount to a dry overly-technical account into an account which is both precise and inspiring. Leiva-Merikakis depends upon Lewis' The Four Loves as an

reducing sexual manifestation of marital love to an instantiation of continent rather than fully-virtuous sexual union.<sup>4</sup>

When both husband and wife engage in fully-virtuous sexual activity, there is no struggle on their part to “do the right thing.” Rather, they consistently do so with freedom, joy, true pleasure, and ease, excellent disposition.<sup>5</sup> While bearing this fully-virtuous end in mind, one would be naïve not to take seriously the fact that

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architectonic backdrop for the “subject and order” of his “four meditations.” See Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis, Love’s Sacred Order: The Four Loves Revisited, 27.

<sup>4</sup> Michael S. Sherwin, By Knowledge & By Love: Charity and Knowledge in the Moral Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 192-203. According to Sherwin, my formulation of marital loving acts as participative in Charity is consistent with Aquinas’ early account of Charity as exemplary form of the virtues. On pg. 195 he writes in accord with Aquinas’ commentary on Lombard’s *Sentences* that “charity is an exemplar form in an active sense, as being that in which something participates . . . in charity’s likeness in a way that causes their very existence.” I follow the early Aquinas on this point because doing more explicitly safeguards Charity’s pride of place among the virtues and coheres well with holistic–optimally-integrated (truly-loving)–rather than dualistic (disintegrated and disintegrative) engagement in sexual activity.

<sup>5</sup> See John Corbett, “*Sacra Doctrina and the Discernment of Human Action*” (Ph.D. diss., University of Fribourg Switzerland, 1999), 119-164. On pg. 128 he writes: “It is a mark of habitus that it be difficult to change. Ease of exercise is likewise a mark of habitus.” On pg. 141 he writes: “The freedom for excellence is the freedom that one possesses when good ends [such as the one bi-partite object of chaste sexual activity between spouses] actually shape the powers of action so that the object of deliberation is firmly settled upon and the good end is attained easily and joyfully. Since freedom is born of the compenetration of mind and will and since the will is naturally oriented to the good, a shaping of powers of action [from mere natural inclination to continence to virtue] such that they readily and joyfully respond to ends perceived as good is no compromise of freedom but the accomplishment of freedom’s true end [freedom from the shackles of vice and incontinence via habituation and attainment of virtue by which spouses lovingly engage in sexual activity specifically called truly-loving by way of its very object].” As participative in Charity which is the form of all other virtues, such progress is elevated to the level of sanctification (Human participation in God’s loving call to eternal union with Him for ages unending).

most if not all people progress through continent struggle (virtue in less-than-fully-mature form) to full virtue (fully-mature/optimally-integrated and stable ennobling habitus).<sup>6</sup>

While behaving well with struggle, continent people unaware of these finer distinctions are at risk for reducing the whole of the Christian moral life to a constant struggle to “do the right thing.”<sup>7</sup>

Specific to Church teaching against spouses engaging in contraceptive sexual activity, one may be tempted to see the Church as an enemy of spouses freely expressing their love for each other without the risk of the wife becoming pregnant, especially when medical risks are involved which may cause

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<sup>6</sup> For a comprehensive crystal-clear account of human progress into greater levels of virtue and “freedom for excellence” see Pinckaers, *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, 354-456. For a very concise analogical account applied to the end-of-life context see Christopher M. Saliga, O.P., “Freedom at the End of Life: Voluntary Death vs. Human Flourishing,” *The National Catholic Bioethics Quarterly* 6.2 (Summer 2006): 256-257. Presuppositions contrary to or consistent with “freedom for excellence” and virtues as essential sources of fully-excellent human action give rise to positions for, or against contraception; positions for, or against abortion; and positions for, or against euthanasia and rational (assisted or unassisted) suicide. Explication of the connections between all three sets of what some reasonably call “Culture of Death” vs. “Culture of Life” issues would take us far beyond the scope of this essay.

<sup>7</sup> Pinckaers, *Sources of Christian Ethics*, 375. Living at only the continent level of moral pursuit would be an immature form of “heroism” at best and a rejection of the full power of virtue at worst. Pinckaers writes that when “law appears as an external restraint and limitation of freedom; it creates an irreducible tension” between law and freedom. If one were to stop here, God’s law might be seen as an infringement upon or, worse yet, a violation of human freedom to be jettisoned. Pinckaers continues: “Law is a necessary aid to the development of [full human] freedom, together with the attraction to the true and the good, which is a note of inner freedom. Law is especially important in the first stage of education. It is progressively interiorized through the virtues of justice and charity.” In the end, virtue and law synergistically enhance human freedom.

significant health problems for the wife and/or any child or children conceived.<sup>8</sup> When this occurs, one may argue that spouses should be allowed to engage in contraceptive sexual acts. Arguing and acting accordingly constitutes an erroneously-supposed albeit “well-intentioned” move out of continent loving sexual activity into incontinent use of contraception, a move away from attaining profoundly-integrative virtue toward truly-disintegrative vice.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid. See also Pinckaers, The Sources of Christian Ethics, 404-405. He writes: “For [Aquinas], natural law [insofar as it is human participation in Divine Law] was the expression, in the form of precepts, of our natural inclinations, which were guided by our inclinations [rational appetites] to goodness and truth. Thus, natural law, imposed externally when taught, was in reality written in the human heart—that is, in the very nature of our human faculties of reason and will, at the root of free action . . . Inclinations developed into virtues, which received their beginnings from them and would provide morality with its main categories . . . In [Aquinas], inclinations [such as the inclination to sexual union and the rearing of offspring], like the natural law, [are] God’s most precious work in the human person, a direct, unique participation in [God’s] own wisdom, goodness, and freedom and the emanation of the eternal law.”

<sup>9</sup> Saint Augustine, The Trinity, trans. Edmund Hill, O.P., ed. John E. Rotelle, O.S.A. (Hyde Park, N.Y.: New City Press, 1991), Bk. XIV, Ch. 4, n. 18. Bearing in mind that we are made in the image and likeness of God, Augustine reminds us of our own capacity to deceive ourselves regarding what such a call entails: “*You shall love the Lord your God* (Mt. 22:37; Dt. 6:5). [While engaging in evil acts] The human mind is wishing itself ill while it imagines that what it wants is not to its disadvantage, but in fact it is wishing itself ill while it imagines that what it wants is not to its disadvantage, and that is why it is written, *Whoever loves iniquity hates his own soul* (Ps. 11:5). So the man who knows how to love himself loves [both neighbor and] God; and the man who does not love God, even though he loves himself [and his wife] which is innate in him by nature, can still be said quite reasonably to hate himself [and his wife] when he does what is against his own [and her own] interests . . . many people do nothing but what is absolutely destructive of themselves.” Such self-deceptive activity constitutes vice which exists in opposition to virtue and “freedom for excellence.”

Moreover, Charity (love of God), of which marital love participates and by which marital love is elevated to full glory in God, and which is not a virtue initially gained via human effort/practice but rather infused into the human person by the Holy Spirit, requires human effort/practice for growth.<sup>10</sup> In short, love of God is strengthened insofar as the human person practices it,<sup>11</sup> a dynamic progression into evermore profound levels of love.<sup>12</sup> Of course, the more one loves God with one's whole person, the more one will love self and spouse in God and visa-versa,<sup>13</sup> hence the Word:

You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength . . . You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no command greater than these.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, II-II, Q. 23, A. 2, response.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, II-II, Q. 23, A. 1.

<sup>12</sup> Sherwin, By Knowledge & By Love: Charity and Knowledge in the Moral Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas, 195-196. In explicating the early Aquinas' grasp of Charity as exemplary form of all the other virtues including subordinate loves, Sherwin writes: "Charity is the form of the virtues not merely because they bear the likeness (*similitudo*) of charity, but because they participate in charity's likeness in a way that causes their very existence . . . Just as prudence is the form of the virtues by instilling the order of prudence [knowing how to best act in this situation in the light of objective truth] upon them, so too Charity is the form of the virtues by instilling the order of Charity [true love of God] upon them, directing them toward the ultimate end of the Christian life [sanctification]."

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Mk. 12:30-31 (New American Bible). I cite Mark rather than Matthew because I agree with the many Scripture scholars that Mark was written prior to Matthew, Luke, and John.

In accord with human composite nature, profoundly-loving sexual activity freely chosen and embraced by both and each spouse increases both and each spouse's love of God, self, and each other. On the contrary, contraceptive sexual activity freely chosen and embraced by both and each spouse directly violates both and each spouse's love of God and His Truth, self, and each other insofar as it militates against the virtue/s by which persons engage in ennobling sexual activity as God intends it to be and the human person most authentically desires it to be.<sup>15</sup>

#### IV. *Eros*: The One Bi-partite Object

Marital love informed by Charity consists of a complex order of loves empowering a variety of loving acts between and among spouses relative to each other and others. Although exhaustive distinctions between these many acts and their effects are beyond the scope of this presentation, a key distinction between *Eros* and

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<sup>15</sup> See Quay, *The Christian Meaning of Human Sexuality*, 71. He writes: "Though it is possible that a couple intend what the contraceptive act says, I think that most . . . do not. There may be true love [consciously intended] between them, and no desire [of which they are consciously aware] to set up barriers to love. Yet, the psychological and moral power of [contraceptive sexual activity between loving spouses] . . . obstructed union works gradually, slowly, imperceptibly, because of its intrinsic meaning and symbolic significance, on [the spouses] conscious minds to generate that cold self-centered hostility to new life known as the "contraceptive mentality." Rather than growth in virtuous freedom, we have degradation into the shackles of vice, two types of moral formation which radically oppose each other.

*Venus* brings into greater clarity the moral object that informs every optimally-integrated (holistically-healthy) sexual act.<sup>16</sup>

“*Eros* is the kind of love that lovers (in freedom and truth) are ‘in.’”<sup>17</sup> C.S. Lewis writes:

Without *Eros* sexual desire, like every other desire, is a fact about ourselves. Within *Eros* it is rather about the beloved. It becomes almost a mode of perception, entirely a mode of expression. It feels objective; something outside us, in the real world. That is why *Eros*, though the king of pleasures, always at its height has the air of regarding pleasure as a by-product. To think about it (the bi-product) would plunge us back in ourselves [implicative of Lust], in our own nervous system. It would kill *Eros*.<sup>18</sup>

According to this formulation, *Eros* takes spouses beyond the status of self-centered-co-seekers-of-genital-pseudo-pleasure operating in accord with *Venus*. This apparently-mutual but in fact isolated and isolating genital activity is Lust-informed. As such, *Venus* is gravely destructive of each of the so-called partners who are in fact acting in sub-human fashion contrary to both spousal communion and communion with God. *Eros*, on the contrary, is that love by which spouses move into true, beautiful,

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<sup>16</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Four Loves* (New York: Harcourt, 1988), 91-92. Lewis distinguishes between mere-animal sexual acts of humans (*Venus*) and one “uniquely human variation” (*Eros*).

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 95-96.

and intensely-pleasurable holistic sexual communion in which they unreservedly surrender themselves to each other.

Analogous to Jesus who lays down his life for his bride the Church, spouses lay down their whole selves one unto other and receive each surrendered other in the most holistic form of marital love, a form which always participates Charity.<sup>19</sup> Such activity sanctifies the spouses and destroys *Venus*. In slightly different language, Pope John Paul II discloses the same reality:

Even though due to the poverty of language, in speaking here of knowledge, the Bible indicates the deepest essence of the reality of married life . . . It is part of the awareness of the meaning of one's own body. In Genesis 4:1, becoming "one flesh," the man and woman experience in a particular way the meaning of their body. In this way, together they become almost one subject of that act and that experience, while remaining, in this unity, two really different subjects . . . both "know" each other . . . In conjugal knowledge, the woman is given to the man and he to her, since the body and [gender] directly enter the structure and content of this knowledge. In this way, the reality of conjugal union [marital

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<sup>19</sup> Leiva-Merikakis, Love's Sacred Order: The Four Loves Revisited, 101. Leiva-Merikakis writes: "*Eros*, quite simply, surpasses *philia* in its intensity, in its finality, in its self-sacrificial and absolute nature, and in its ability to confer bliss, which is why in Scripture the images of God as friend are eventually eclipsed by those of God as Bridegroom. By its very nature, *eros* is more God-like than *philia*, because it is more complete." Leiva-Merikakis does not distinguish between *Eros* and *Venus* as does Lewis. Thus, he goes on to give an account of *Eros* spinning out of control, an account that is too dualistic. I think that Lewis' account is superior for two reasons. First, Lewis' account of *Eros* is holistic. Second, Lewis clearly distinguishes between *Venus* and *Eros* such that the contrary objects which ground two contrary species of human action are more easily grasped by readers.

communion], in which man and woman become one flesh, contains a new and, in a way, definitive discovery of the meaning of the human body . . .<sup>20</sup>

In accord with the insights of C.S. Lewis and Pope John Paul II, one can confidently claim that profound spousal communion via *Eros* is far more desirable than contrary isolation brought about through sub-human *Venus*.

*Eros* is more desirable than *Venus* because marriage is first and foremost a vocation, a call/gift from God by which husband and wife are capacitated to fulfill both their most profound natural inclinations “to sexual union and the rearing of offspring”<sup>21</sup> and the final destiny for which God has created them in the first place, eternal beatitude.

When spouses more clearly see the levels of holistic communion with each other and eternal communion with God to which they are called via sacramental marriage, they choose the better portion unto the destruction of *Venus* (Lust by which sexual acts are defined as debased acts of self-centered contra-

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<sup>20</sup> Pope John Paul II. The Theology of the Body: Human Love in the Divine Plan (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 1997), 79.

<sup>21</sup> Pinckaers, The Sources of Christian Ethics, 404-408. He cites Cicero as having recognized “the natural tendency to . . . sexual union in view of generating and rearing offspring” as common to both humans and sub-rational animals. That being said, specifically human spousal sexual communion with openness to the gift of new life is the uniquely-marital instantiation of “the [specifically-human] natural inclination to live in society [communion with each other].” Pinckaers opines that Cicero’s treatment of natural inclinations is the best possible introduction to Aquinas’ teaching on the topic of natural inclinations.

communal pseudo pleasure) in accord with their deepest inclinations (best interests). This *Venus* (Lust) is always and in every circumstance the object of contraceptive sexual activity even when one or both of the spouses fail to apprehend it as such and choose to engage in contraceptive sexual activity under an erroneous grasp of the good.<sup>22</sup> That is to say, regardless of apparent good intention and regardless of circumstances, such activity is in fact bad by way of its object. This object is clearly defined:

Lust [*Venus*] is disordered desire for inordinate enjoyment of sexual pleasure [a *sine qua non* of sexual activity]. Sexual pleasure is morally disordered [debased/grounded in the wrong object] when sought for itself [rather than happily enjoyed as an excellent side effect of virtuous sexual action between loving spouses], isolated from its procreative and unite purposes.<sup>23</sup>

In the end, contraception is correctly understood by the Church to be objectively bad because it violates the one bi-partite object (*Eros*) of every virtuous sexual act by which spouses

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<sup>22</sup> Pope Paul VI, On the Regulation of Birth, n. 13. “To use this divine gift destroying, even if only partially, its meaning and its purpose is to contradict the nature both of man and of woman and of their most intimate relationship, and therefore to contradict also the plan of God and His will. On the other hand, to make use of the gift of conjugal love while respecting the laws of the generative process means to acknowledge oneself not the arbiter of the sources of human life, but rather the minister [steward] of the design established by the Creator.”

<sup>23</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., trans. United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997), n. 1660.

holistically manifest their love for each other fully informed/elevated by nothing less than Charity (their love of God).<sup>24</sup>

## V. Well-guided Practice

Catholic health care institutions and all practices therein must uphold the “dignity of marriage [thus] . . . medical practices that undermine the biological, psychological, and moral bonds on which the strength of marriage and the family depends [cannot be approved].”<sup>25</sup> Taking such a strong stance against contraceptive medical interventions respects, safeguards, and promotes the fullest possible communion between spouses with each other and with God.

It is with this in mind that all policies which guide medical and allied health practices within Catholic health care institutions must cohere with a key directive:

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<sup>24</sup> Pope Paul VI, On the Regulation of Birth, n. 12. “The teaching often set forth by the magisterium, is founded upon the inseparable connection, willed by God and unable to be broken by man on his own initiative, between the two meanings of the conjugal act: the unitive meaning and the procreative meaning [the one-bipartite-not-to-be-broken-apart-object of virtuous sexual activity].” This is to say that each and every virtuous sexual act between spouses is of the type that in fact both brings about greater union between spouses and the conditions by which those spouses are openly receptive to the possibility that God may bless them with a child via this act, an act in accord with their God-given human nature.

<sup>25</sup> USCCB, Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services, Introduction, Part Four.

Catholic health institutions may not promote or condone contraceptive practices but should provide, for married couples and the medical staff who counsel them, instruction both about the Church's teaching on responsible parenthood and in the methods of natural family planning.<sup>26</sup>

This directive condemns contraceptive practices not to violate spousal exercise of free choice but rather to help spouses choose methods of family planning in accord with their God-given human nature, their best interests, and their full freedom.

But what about situations in which pregnancy may lead to health problems for the mother and/or any child or children conceived?<sup>27</sup> One can empathize with the emotion/s behind such questions. That being said, contraception is always wrong, regardless of any good intention because contraception *de facto* changes the nature of true sexual union informed by *Eros* into

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<sup>26</sup> USCCB, Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services, n. 52.

<sup>27</sup> USCCB, Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services, n. 53. This directive states: "Direct [contraceptive] sterilization of either men or women, whether permanent or temporary, is not permitted in a Catholic health care institution. [Non-contraceptive] procedures that induce sterility are permitted when their direct effect is the cure or alleviation of a present and serious pathology and simpler treatment is not available." For example, in the case of a woman suffering a cancer that requires removal of her ovaries and uterus for the good of increasing her probability of survival (medically prudent) and not for the purpose of preventing pregnancy as a means to such an end, removal of her ovaries is morally legitimate because doing so is, among other things, non-contraceptive by way of its object and intention. Such actions are objectively and prudentially discerned via the Principle of Double Effect (PDE). Full explication of the PDE would take us beyond the scope of this paper. For a clear and concise explication of the PDE, see Peter Cataldo, "The Principle of Double Effect," in *Ethical Principle in Catholic Health Care*, ed. Edward Furton (Boston, MA: The National Catholic Bioethics Center, 1999), 81-84. Cf. note 38.

false sexual union informed by *Venus*. Even with the best of intentions, couples who contracept always do so contrary to their own integration (fuller progress in virtue) even when they are not intentionally lying.

These altered acts are not necessarily lies; that is, the person who performs such an act need not mean something different from what that action means in itself . . . But what he is saying is, itself, whether so intended or not, corrupt and evil because he has perverted and undone the nature of the sexual act. If the perfection of human nature [ultimately called sanctification] is genuine and unflawed love, then acts that corrupt the bodily signs of such love are evil . . . they symbolize some corruption of love or some refusal of love.<sup>28</sup>

This is why “Catholic health institutions may not promote or condone contraceptive practices.” As is the case with those patients themselves who erroneously think they have a “good intention,” physicians and other clinicians who are also erroneously “well-intentioned” actually do their patients harm by offering or encouraging contraceptive interventions to one or both of the spouses.

But again, what about situations in which pregnancy may lead to health problems for the mother and/or any child or children conceived?<sup>29</sup> The answer lies in our earlier mentioned directive:

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<sup>28</sup> Quay, *The Christian Meaning of Human Sexuality*, 68.

<sup>29</sup> USCCB, *Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services*, n. 54. Bearing in mind both the gravity of certain genetic pathologies

Catholic health institutions . . . should provide, for married couples and the medical staff who counsel them, instruction both about the Church’s teaching on responsible parenthood and in the methods of natural family planning.<sup>30</sup>

Natural family planning (NFP) is objectively consistent with *Eros*, marital union and openness to the possibility of new life. It includes a variety of methods that spouses can take to avoid pregnancy, methods such as the standard-days method and the symptothermal method.<sup>31</sup> In fact, many people go beyond merely-objective claims to state that such approaches actually increase “communication and intimacy” between spouses.<sup>32</sup>

From a different perspective, one supposed disadvantage of NFP methods is the fact that “commitment, motivation, and cooperation of both [spouses] is necessary” for them to successfully reduce the probability of pregnancy while engaging in sexual union.<sup>33</sup> Listing this as a disadvantage rather than an

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and the fact that contraceptive measures are absolutely never to be allowed or encouraged within Catholic health care organizations, “genetic counseling [in accord with these parameters] may be provided in order to promote responsible parenthood and to prepare for the proper treatment and care of children with genetic disorders, in accordance with Catholic moral teaching and the intrinsic rights and obligations of married couples regarding the transmission of life.”

<sup>30</sup> USCCB, Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services, n. 52.

<sup>31</sup> For particular descriptions of each of these methods and their effectiveness, consult Georgetown University’s Institute for Reproductive Health Web site (<http://www.irh.org/nfp.htm>).

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

advantage implies that the effort necessary for profound spousal union in accord with prudentially reducing the probability of pregnancy is a problem which some spouses would prefer to avoid, an implicit recognition that contraceptive sexual activity between spouses amounts to a minimalist approach to spousal union. This makes sense given the fact that contraceptive sexual activity objectively coheres with *Venus* and thereby contravenes *Eros*. In short, movement out of continent sexual activity *en route* to full virtue and freedom into incontinent sexual activity tending toward vice occurs in such minimalist approaches to spousal sexual activity.

Contrary to contraceptive vitiation, couples who desire to reduce the probability of pregnancy because doing so is prudent while also engaging in *Eros*-informed sexual union can do so with a high probability of success. “Couples who use natural methods correctly to prevent pregnancy have only a 1% to 9% chance of becoming pregnant during one year of use, depending on which method they use.”<sup>34</sup> As such, these spouses can continue to engage in virtuous sexual activity by which they are profoundly united with each other and remain open to the possibility of new life in accord with medical prudence, an ennobling nexus of Love and Truth.

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<sup>34</sup> Georgetown University’s Institute for Reproductive Health Web site (<http://www.irh.org/nfp.htm>). Cf. note 50.

Beyond husbands and wives, Physicians, other allied health professionals, chaplains, administrators, etc. also have the right to instruction “about the Church’s teaching on . . . the methods of natural family planning.”<sup>35</sup> The good news is that there are many organizations, some national and others local, which can be turned to for inservice training, private instruction, lectures, and sound literature regarding the full variety of NFP methodologies.<sup>36</sup> Thus, multidisciplinary groups of professionals, such as well-diversified hospital ethics committees, within Catholic health care organizations would do well to develop improved staff and patient educational practices within their particular facilities.

## VI. Conclusion

Given the fact that the human person is a holistic rather than dualistic being naturally inclined to progress in virtue via the God-given vocation of marriage as a particular path to sanctity, and in light of the object by which each profoundly-communitive sexual act truly exists, non-contraceptive sexual and medical practices

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<sup>35</sup> USCCB, Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services, n. 52.

<sup>36</sup> A careful and exhaustive consideration of the many organizations and particularities regarding NFP would take us far beyond the scope of this essay. For consideration of relevant particularities, consult The Natural Family Planning Web site (<http://www.byqpub.com/natural/natural-family-planning.htm>); and/or the Couple to Couple League Web site (<http://www.ccli.org/>); and/or the Natural Family Planning section of the USCCB Web site (<http://www.usccb.org/prolife/issues/nfp/index.shtml>). For literature on the ethics of NFP and/or to consult Catholic ethicists on the topic, consult The National Catholic Bioethics Center Web site (<http://ncbcenter.org/>).

are rightly upheld and promoted within authentically-Catholic health care. Clinicians who practice accordingly actually protect and promote the holistic well-being of spouses in their care, husbands and wives who in fact grow in love of each other and of God via truly-virtuous sexual activity. In the end, these clinicians in fact practice well-guided (authentically-Catholic) health care in true accord with the best interests of their patients.

## VI. Key References

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