

“Be Fruitful and Multiply”: The Ethics of Nonabortifacient Contraceptive Use within Fruitful Christian Marriages

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Corrine Burmeister has written a well-researched and thoughtful essay on a sensitive and challenging topic, one that is hardly abstract or theoretical for Christian husbands and wives. She provides a helpful survey and comprehensive summary of the various theological considerations involved in the prospect of contraception within a godly marriage. That she does so from the perspective of a Christian wife and mother is of genuine value and benefit, not only to husbands and fathers in caring for their families, but also to pastors seeking to advise, counsel, and guide the couples of their congregations. Life under the cross in this fallen and perishing world often makes it difficult to get our bearings and to know how we ought to proceed. Mrs. Burmeister does not presume to answer all the questions, nor would that be appropriate or even possible, but she does provide information and insight that may well assist pastors in bringing the word of God to bear upon the difficult circumstances confronting husbands and wives in their life together.

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I. Contraception: The Current Debate

The subject of contraception is infrequently debated at this time in Christian history. Whereas the advent of birth control resulted in universal condemnation from Christianity one hundred years ago, today, most Protestant denominations accept its use unquestioningly and without reservation. Roman Catholicism remains against contraceptive use,¹ but the papacy has given its blessing on “natural family planning” (a.k.a. “the rhythm method”), in which couples avoid intercourse during the wife’s fertile period as a way to space or limit the number of their children.² More conservative Protestant denominations such as The Lutheran Church—Missouri

¹ Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae*, July 25, 1968, https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_25071968_humanae-vitae.html.

² Pius XI, *Casti Connubii*, December 31, 1930, https://www.vatican.va/content/pius-xi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_19301231_casti-connubii.html.

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Synod (LCMS) accept contraceptive use within marriages but with caveats against avoiding children entirely. The LCMS' Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) asserts that "in the absence of Scriptural prohibition, there need be no objection to contraception within a marital union which is, as a whole, fruitful."³ However, some of today's prominent religiously conservative voices are advocating a more restrictive view of this issue,⁴ leading some LCMS Christians with sensitive consciences to wrestle with whether nonabortifacient contraceptive use within fruitful Christian marriages is a morally acceptable option for family planning.⁵ I can attest personally to the tormenting intensity of a bad conscience in this area and the resulting damage to marital intimacy. For me, a combination of pastoral counseling, private Confession and Absolution, and the intensive research and writing undertaken for this article has done much to quiet my conscience. I share my work here in the hopes that others might benefit from my research and female perspective when counseling and guiding those who are also experiencing a crisis of conscience on this issue. Below, I defend the idea that contraception is indeed a morally acceptable option if used in specific, limited circumstances.

II. The Purposes of Marriage

Before considering the ethics of contraception within marriage, establishing God's purpose for that institution is essential. In the beginning, God declares, "It is not good that the man should be alone" (Gen 2:18), thereafter creating Eve from Adam's rib for his help and companionship.⁶ Adam and Eve share a "one flesh" union (Gen 2:24), in which both are "naked and . . . not ashamed" (Gen 2:25). God gives them the command to "[b]e fruitful and multiply" and to "have dominion" over the earth (Gen 1:28). From this foundational section of Scripture, we see the first two major purposes for marriage: a *unitive* and a *procreative* purpose. Since the fall into sin, however, we also see scriptural precedent for marriage serving a third *healing* function that gives spouses a God-pleasing outlet for their sexual desire as an aid in avoiding sexual sin. Paul speaks on this point quite clearly. "Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote

³ Social Concerns Committee of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, *Human Sexuality: A Theological Perspective* ([St. Louis]: n.p., 1981), 19.

⁴ For example, see note 32 below.

⁵ I am defining nonabortifacient contraceptives as any that prevent a sperm and an egg from meeting, rather than as those that prevent a fertilized egg from implanting. All references to contraception in this article refer to this type of birth control rather than to any I would classify as abortifacients. For a fuller discussion of this topic, see Donna J. Harrison, "Contraception: An Embryo's Point of View," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 84, no. 1–2 (January 2020): 137–159.

⁶ All Bible quotations are from the ESV.

yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control" (1 Cor 7:5).

While nearly all of modern Christendom agrees on these three purposes for marriage and the sexual union inherent to that institution, not everyone agrees on which purposes are primary.⁷ In fact, the Christian emphasis on the unitive purpose as valuable for its own sake is a relatively recent development. Bishop Augustine of Hippo, who was deeply influential on both Martin Luther and the Roman Catholic Church, was generally suspicious of pleasure and viewed the purpose of marital intercourse as purely procreative.⁸ Following his lead, Reformation-era theologians of all stripes agreed on the primacy of marriage's procreative purpose. Unlike the Roman Catholic Church, however, the Reformers honored marriage as "the first of all institutions" (LC I 207),⁹ significantly departing from the Roman Catholic view of church offices—which required celibacy—as inherently holier than family life. In this same vein, the Reformers also championed marriage's healing purpose, emphasizing the pleasures of married sex as a godly outlet for sexual desire, further exco-riating the Roman Catholic supplantation of marriage with monasticism (e.g., Ap XXIII 6–22). The Reformers' observation that "few people have the gift to live a celibate life" (AC XXIII 5 German)¹⁰ and their resultant emphasis on marriage's healing purpose was a radical assertion for the day and may have eclipsed any serious consideration of marriage's unitive purpose.

Martin Luther exhibits this thinking quite well. See, for example, his thoughts on marriage in his treatment of the sixth commandment in his Large Catechism: "He has established [marriage] before all others as the first of all institutions, and he created man and woman differently (as is evident) not for indecency but to be true to each other, to be fruitful, to beget children, and to nurture and bring them up to the glory of God" (LC I 207).¹¹ While we see a hint of the unitive purpose in Luther's exhortation to "be true to each other," this encouragement is best understood in the context of the command not to commit adultery and is more likely a reference to

⁷ For simplicity's sake, I refer to the purposes of marriage and marital intercourse interchangeably. However, some Christian theologians draw a distinction between the two. Roman Catholic theologian and ethicist Martin Rhonheimer is a good example of this. (See note 29 below for further details.)

⁸ Gilbert Meilaender notes that Augustine "treats sexual desire almost exactly as he treats the desire for food. Even as one should come to the table to eat when one's body needs nourishment, so also would our first parents have come to the marriage bed when children were needed." Gilbert Meilaender, "Sex," in *The Way That Leads There: Augustinian Reflections on the Christian Life* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 128.

⁹ In *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, ed. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, trans. Charles Arand et al. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 414.

¹⁰ In Kolb and Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 63.

¹¹ In Kolb and Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 414.

marriage's healing purpose than a positive affirmation of marital union as a good in and of itself. As for the rest of the quotation, his other three listed reasons are all related to procreation.

Similarly, in his *Lectures on Genesis*, Luther declares that those who marry with the primary goal of becoming parents "are really angels . . . because they desire to make use of marriage for procreation."¹² He lists a second group of people who "marry for the sake of avoiding fornication. They do not turn away from or hate children, but it is their main purpose to live chastely and modestly. These, too, are pious people, but they are not on a par with the former."¹³ He then characterizes two other classes of marriages, of which he speaks negatively: those who do so "to have a pretty girl to give them pleasure" but are "not concerned about children," and those who "seek only wealth and honor, not the begetting of children!"¹⁴ While Luther upholds marriage's healing purpose in the second instance, he highlights the procreative purpose in each and every example. Later in the same *Lectures on Genesis*, Luther speaks even more plainly. "But the purpose of marriage is not to have pleasure and to be idle but *to procreate and bring up children, to support a household*."¹⁵ Hence, the case is strong that for Luther, procreation is marriage's primary purpose. As for the unitive purpose, we see no explicit reference. Luther does mention the goodness of husbands "loving their wives and their offspring" in his characterization of those who marry to avoid fornication.¹⁶ While this *might* be an oblique reference to marriage's unitive purpose, Luther would certainly be keeping the reference muted.

A stronger hint from Luther regarding the unitive purpose of marriage exists in his Large Catechism's discussion of the sixth commandment. There, Luther notes that the command to avoid adultery "proceed[s] to the person nearest him, or the closest possession next after his body, namely, his wife, *who is one flesh and blood with him*" (LC I 200).¹⁷ While Luther does not explicitly deal with the purposes of marriage in speaking on this commandment, his highlighting of the one-flesh union shows that he acknowledged the unitive purpose of marriage, even though he did

¹² Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis* (1535–1545/1544–1554), in *Luther's Works, American Edition*, vols. 1–30, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955–1976), 4:304–305 (hereafter cited as AE).

¹³ Luther, *Lectures on Genesis*, AE 4:305.

¹⁴ Luther, *Lectures on Genesis*, AE 4:305.

¹⁵ Luther, *Lectures on Genesis*, AE 5:363; emphasis my own.

¹⁶ Luther, *Lectures on Genesis*, AE 4:305.

¹⁷ In *Triglot Concordia: The Symbolical Books of the Ev. Lutheran Church, German-Latin-English*, [ed. and trans. F. Bente and W. H. T. Dau] (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), 637; emphasis my own. Special thanks to my ethics professor, Michael Fiebert, for bringing this to my attention.

not ever treat the issue systematically. It seems unlikely, however, that he would have placed the unitive purpose above the procreative.

III. Contraception and the Purposes of Marriage

While contraception as we know it did not exist during the Reformation, both Luther and Martin Chemnitz made very brief references to preventing conception. Chemnitz speaks the most forcefully, asserting that “those things which hinder conception” break the fifth commandment’s injunction against murder, just as does “destroying the fetus in the womb.”¹⁸ Luther similarly links preventing conception with abortion when he says, “How many girls there are who prevent conception and kill and expel tender fetuses, although procreation is the work of God!”¹⁹ Later in his *Lectures on Genesis*, Luther also discusses Onan’s failure to fulfill the obligations of levirate marriage to Tamar when he intentionally spilled his seed during intercourse (Gen 38:6–9).²⁰ Luther calls Onan’s actions “a most disgraceful sin . . . far more atrocious than incest and adultery. We call it unchastity,²¹ yes, a Sodomitic sin,” for “[s]urely at such a time the order of nature established by God in procreation should be followed.”²² Luther goes on to say that Onan deserved to die because of his unwillingness to “bear that intolerable slavery” of begetting children for his brother.²³ In reading Luther closely, one might argue whether he declared Onan deserving of death because of coitus interruptus alone or because of his desire to avoid

¹⁸ Martin Chemnitz, *Loci Theologici*, trans. J. A. O. Preus (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1989), 2:406.

¹⁹ Luther, *Lectures on Genesis*, AE 4:304.

²⁰ While this episode occurs prior to God’s establishing levirate marriage as part of Israel’s civil law as recorded in Deut 25:5–10, using the term in Onan’s case is still appropriate. “The term ‘levirate’ is derived from the Latin *levir*, which means ‘brother-in-law’; this in turn is a translation of the Hebrew *yabham*, which as a noun is defined as a ‘husband’s brother.’” Dale W. Manor, “A Brief History of Levirate Marriage as It Relates to the Bible,” *Restoration Quarterly* 27, no. 3 (1984): 129.

²¹ Benjamin T. G. Mayes, one of the editors for volumes 56–82 of AE, argues that the underlying Latin Luther used here (*mollities*) was mistranslated as “unchastity” in this instance. “The standard Latin word for auto-erotic behavior, used since the classical Latin era through the eighteenth century, was *mollities*. In Latin-English dictionaries of classical Latin, this is defined usually as ‘softness.’ From the usage and definitions given by Martin Luther and Johann Gerhard, however, it is clear that the term means any voluntary ejaculation outside of intercourse, no matter how this is caused. . . . ‘[U]nchastity’ is far too broad a term. Instead, it should have been ‘softness’ with a footnote explaining that this means ‘voluntary seminal discharge outside of a woman’s body.’” Benjamin T. G. Mayes, “Self-Pollution: Its Definition and Cure,” in *Ethics of Sex: From Taboo to Delight*, ed. Gifford A. Grobrien (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2017), 146, 150.

²² Luther, *Lectures on Genesis*, AE 7:20–21. Note that Luther compares coitus interruptus to homosexual sex acts, a “Sodomitic sin.” This is identical to the modern Roman Catholic view. See note 30 below.

²³ Luther, *Lectures on Genesis*, AE 7:21.

the obligations of levirate marriage.²⁴ Luther speaks of Onan's sin in a unified way, making it difficult to say for certain how he would have parsed the two issues.²⁵ However, considering Luther's strong emphasis on the procreative purpose of marriage combined with his statement linking the prevention of conception with abortion, I am inclined to believe he would have taken an incredibly dim view of any means of preventing conception. While these Reformation-era references to the prevention of conception were difficult to locate and were by no means a major focus of Reformation-era teaching, I find it hard to imagine after reading them that the Reformers would approve of contraception as we know it today.²⁶ Understanding their thinking on marriage and family planning helps us grasp the terms of the present-day debate and consider the validity of the various evolutions in thought.

Modern Roman Catholic thinking retains its Augustinian influence regarding the purposes of marriage. Exemplifying this, theologian and ethicist Martin Rhonheimer argues that "from this [marital] love between persons who give themselves to one another without reserve arises a new human life, and that is the primary fruit of this love. . . . [I]t is also called its primary end."²⁷ He claims, "Only secondarily is it proper of this marital love that it also bears the 'fruit' of reciprocal help in life, something that in fact could be characteristic of other types of communion of human life."²⁸ While Rhonheimer acknowledges the self-giving love between husband and wife, he sees its "primary end" as procreation. He denounces in the strongest

²⁴ Persuasively, Mayes holds that Lutheran theologians have long held that Onan deserved to die because of his act of coitus interruptus alone. "From this Bible passage, another technical Latin term arose, *onania*, that is, 'Onan's sin.' By this, Lutheran theologians meant both *coitus interruptus* and self-pollution [masturbation]; what joined these two concepts together was the voluntary spilling of seed outside of intercourse." Mayes, "Self-Pollution," 150.

²⁵ More recent confessional-Lutheran exegetes have taken the stance that Onan was punished for the sum total of his rebellion (refusing to obey his father's explicit command to fulfill the custom of levirate marriage, as well as taking sexual pleasure while simultaneously rejecting his responsibility to raise up a child for his brother and care for his widow) rather than for the act of coitus interruptus on its own. The debate on this passage is mentioned in Alan Graebner's "Birth Control and the Lutherans: The Missouri Synod as a Case Study." There, Graebner shares that in the 1940s, LCMS theologian Alfred M. Rehwinkel was among the first in Lutheran circles to explicitly contradict the argument that the instance of Onan proves that preventing conception in all cases rises to the level of moral law. (See note 31 below on Rehwinkel). "Only a clear Scriptural word could prohibit contraceptives, Rehwinkel insisted, and this he could not find." Alan Graebner, "Birth Control and the Lutherans: The Missouri Synod as a Case Study," *Journal of Social History* 2, no. 4 (Summer 1969): 321.

²⁶ I would have had a much more difficult time discovering these Reformation-era references without the work of Michael W. Salemink, "The Sanctity of Life in the Lutheran Confessions," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 87, no. 1 (January 2023): 75–82.

²⁷ Martin Rhonheimer, "Toward an Adequate Argument in Support of *Humanae Vitae*," in *Ethics of Procreation and the Defense of Human Life: Contraception, Artificial Fertilization, and Abortion*, ed. William F. Murphy (Washington, DC: Catholic Univ. of America Press, 2010), 86.

²⁸ Rhonheimer, "Toward an Adequate Argument," 86.

terms the “false supposition that ‘loving union’ must be considered the primary end of marriage (and of sexuality in general), whereas in reality ‘loving union’ is the fundamental aspect of the *object of the conjugal act*.”²⁹ Thus, marriage exists primarily for the begetting of children, with sex serving that end. In this view, procreative-capable sex within marriage does deliver a deep spirit-body union with the spouse, but the union is fractured if children are intentionally prevented.³⁰

IV. The Protestant Rethinking of Contraception

While Roman Catholic thinking has largely remained consistent regarding marriage’s primary purpose being procreation, Protestant thinking has shifted. Writing in 1959, Alfred Rehwinkel notes that while the LCMS of the time had no official position on the various purposes of marriage, the unofficial position was that the “purpose of marriage is the procreation of offspring, and the frustration of this purpose or the limiting of the number of children by the use of artificial means, by drugs, or unnatural practices is sinful.”³¹ As advances in contraceptive technologies

²⁹ Rhonheimer, “Toward an Adequate Argument,” 88. Note that Rhonheimer differentiates between the purposes of marriage and sex. While he technically places the unitive above the procreative in the sex act itself, because he insists that such acts be open to procreation in order to be valid and then asserts that marriage’s primary purpose is to facilitate the type of love that results in new life, this becomes a distinction without a difference.

³⁰ Rhonheimer actually states it much more strongly than this. He likens married heterosexual contraceptive sex to homosexual sex between partners who “claim a relationship of personal love.” Rhonheimer, “Toward an Adequate Argument,” 102. For him, any sexual activity not of itself capable of procreation “is not in itself a *sexual act*; it is exclusively a ‘method,’ which *relates* to sexual acts only by preventing their procreative consequences” (100). He is far from the only Roman Catholic to take this stance. After quoting Elizabeth Anscombe saying something similar, Mary Eberstadt characterizes married couples using contraception as “heterosexuals . . . claiming the right to act as homosexuals.” Mary Eberstadt, “The Vindication of *Humanae Vitae*,” in *Adam and Eve After the Pill: Paradoxes of the Sexual Revolution* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2012), 150.

³¹ Alfred Martin Rehwinkel, *Planned Parenthood and Birth Control in the Light of Christian Ethics* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), 43. In citing Rehwinkel, especially from a book he unfortunately entitled *Planned Parenthood* (a phrase he uses synonymously with “family planning”), I must acknowledge that he has been rightly criticized for his defense of Margaret Sanger in this work. In reading the book in its entirety, his positive portrayal of her seems to have been related to his impression that she desired to help impoverished women suffering from having more children than they could handle rather than for her abortion advocacy. Regardless, his thinking of contraception in terms of what is good for greater society has more eugenic overtones than is comfortable, and he horribly advises that Christian couples seek Planned Parenthood’s help if they need access to family-planning services. Still, throughout the book, he unequivocally condemns abortion, encourages couples to have as many children as they can, and denounces determining ahead of time how many children a marriage should have. Considering this, one has to wonder whether he was blinded to Margaret Sanger’s abortive proclivities by Planned Parenthood’s careful use of language. From the way he speaks, it seems the Planned Parenthood he knew billed itself as a place mainly to access contraception and family-planning services, and that they provided abortion only for acute emergencies in which the life of the mother was in active danger. We can look back on him from our modern vantage point, knowing what Planned Parenthood has become

and the societal pressures that accompanied them brought this issue to the fore, however, Protestants of all stripes began the difficult process of reexamining Scripture and formulating new responses. While some have accused Protestants of bending their position in order to be more socially acceptable,³² the shift in Protestant thinking can be explained instead as being due to a methodical process of continued engagement with Scripture in response to the aforementioned societal pressures.³³

In wrestling with this issue, Protestant theologians turned fresh eyes to Genesis and the order of creation. Helmut Thielicke reflected this thinking when he stated, “We regard the personal relationship of marriage to be the central emphasis of the order of creation and thus attribute to it an intrinsic value which exists even apart from the procreation of children and the function of marriage to channelize the libido.”³⁴ Rehwinkel outlines the same three Biblical purposes of marriage that Thielicke does, also asserting that a sound understanding of Genesis 2 necessitates making the unitive purpose primary.³⁵ Thielicke wrote his influential treatment of marriage’s purposes only five years after Rehwinkel, and seventeen years after that, the CTCR adopted a similar position, affirming that the “relation between husband and wife has a significance and meaning in and of itself, distinct from any other purposes (such as procreation) which their union may serve.”³⁶ The importance of

and the evil they have wrought, and rightly criticize his lack of discernment. At the same time, we can also remember that he was a human being with a limited perspective colored by the zeitgeist of his time. Setting aside the troubles with his book mentioned above, I actually found much in his work that echoed other solidly-confessional-Lutheran thinkers quoted in this article. I even found some of his thoughts compelling enough to quote. By doing so, I am in no way endorsing his positive portrayal of Margaret Sanger, his poor judgment in advocating that Christian couples seek help with family-planning resources from Planned Parenthood, or his seeming openness to society-level procreative decision-making for vulnerable individuals. I quote him where I find him helpful because I believe that we can appreciate what he added to the discussion without endorsing every aspect of his thinking.

³² Heath R. Curtis exemplifies this view. “Although all Christians of all denominations stood together against contraception for 1,930 years, today birth control is an accepted part of life for the vast majority of American Christians. . . . It is the old story of the Church caving in to the will of the world.” H. R. Curtis, *Should Christian Couples Use Contraception? What the Bible, the Church’s Witness, and Natural Law Have to Say about Birth Control*, 3rd ed. (self-pub., 2009), 10.

³³ The story is, of course, much more complicated than I have space here to outline. Whether societal pressures or strict fidelity to Scripture held more weight in our collective decision-making on this issue is something about which conscientious Christians could reasonably disagree. What cannot be denied, however, is that Christians have intensely sought guidance from Scripture on the problem of contraception and have come to varying conclusions. For a very well-done and thorough examination of how the reproductive-rights movement impacted this debate in Protestant Christian circles, see Eli T. Plopper, “Protestants and the Acceptance of Contraceptives in Britain and the U.S.A.,” (PhD diss., Univ. of Notre Dame, 2015).

³⁴ Helmut Thielicke, “Birth Control: The Problem of Optional Sterility,” in *Theological Ethics*, vol. 3, Sex, trans. John W. Doberstein (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 208.

³⁵ Rehwinkel, *Planned Parenthood*, 75.

³⁶ *Human Sexuality*, 13.

acknowledging marriage's unitive purpose in the contraception debate cannot be overstated. LCMS clergyman and ethicist Gilbert Meilaender credits the Protestant understanding that Scripture speaks of "both a procreative and a unitive good of marriage" as the major contributing factor that allowed them "to consider the relation—and the separation—of these goods in new ways."³⁷

Another development in Protestant thinking had to do with considering sin's effect on marriage. Here, Thielicke broke new ground by observing that sin and its consequences can cause conflicts between the purposes of marriage that would have never occurred in perfection. He observed that "the sound order of creation has been wounded by the unsound world and that the Mosaic bill of divorce is an evidence of that wound in its integrity. We must see that in this aeon its elements are in conflict."³⁸ Just as God allowed for divorce because of sin (Matt 19:8), so we also have to grapple with difficult cases where the goods of marriage are in conflict rather than harmony. Thielicke suggests this might happen when "the procreation of children does not perfect the marital fellowship (as is intended by the order of creation) but rather threatens it (as it can in some concrete exceptional situations)."³⁹ However, if the unitive purpose is habitually elevated above the procreative, the CTCR warns that the union risks turning "wholly inward and becom[ing] a purely self-serving one."⁴⁰ Likewise, Thielicke was quick to point out that "a willful and permanent refusal to have children on principle constitutes a reduction of the purpose of marriage in the order of creation, a sundering of what God has joined together, and therefore something that is not in accord with the proper will of God."⁴¹ Meilaender also echoes this sentiment: "deliberately avoiding children indefinitely could be expected to have a subtle but deformative effect on the character of their love. Were this to happen, then, clearly the several goods of marriage would have been separated too greatly."⁴²

V. Conflicts between the Purposes of Marriage

A conflict can also occur in situations involving marriage's healing purpose. Gifford Grobien notes that "sexual activity has its fulfillment in personal communication . . . [which] includes physical pleasure. Yet, pleasure is in service of this

³⁷ Meilaender, "Sex," 135, 139. This is not true only for Protestants, however. Pope Pius XI's acknowledgment of the unitive purpose of marriage in his 1930 encyclical *Casti Connubii* enabled him to bless couples' use of the rhythm method, even if he kept the door closed on contraceptives.

³⁸ Thielicke, "Birth Control," 211.

³⁹ Thielicke, "Birth Control," 205.

⁴⁰ *Human Sexuality*, 17.

⁴¹ Thielicke, "Birth Control," 206.

⁴² Meilaender, "Sex," 137.

personal communication, not the other way around.”⁴³ Thus, as Meilaender warns, if we understand marital sexuality primarily as “a personally fulfilling undertaking intended to make us happy and give us pleasure,” it becomes a “self-serving . . . distortion.”⁴⁴ Rhonheimer raises a similar objection when he maintains that any separation of purposes in the marital union functionally results in “[d]isintegrated sexuality,” an essentially “destructive force . . . that gradually breaks down marital love, making its bodily expression a meaningless gesture that turns the individual affectively back on himself.”⁴⁵ This is one of the reasons he and other Roman Catholic thinkers remain so strongly in favor of the “inseparability principle,” the idea that preventing conception in an individual act of sexual intercourse essentially and by itself changes the meaning of that act so that it can no longer be truly unitive.⁴⁶ While Rhonheimer tends to see the separation of purposes in each individual sex act as a *cause* of sin and brokenness in the marriage, Thielicke and those influenced by him tend to see an overall pattern of separation between the purposes of marriage as a *result* of sin and brokenness. Certainly, examples could be found that exemplify both views. However, narrowly focusing on each individual sex act easily results in a rigidity that fails to consider the health of the marriage as a whole. Taking Thielicke’s view, many confessional Lutherans understand that it may be necessary temporarily to elevate one purpose over another so that over the whole life of a marriage, the integrity of all three purposes is maintained with no one purpose dominating the others.

Some additional consideration of the healing purpose is necessary since many Roman Catholic theologians maintain an ascetic view of sexual pleasure. For example, Rhonheimer frames the issue as purely functional: “preservation of the species . . . is assured by the fact that the acts in question are accompanied by an intense experience of libido.”⁴⁷ He also makes no mention of marriage as a God-pleasing outlet for sexual desire, since “the sexual drive alone does not produce a bond among a man and a woman—its natural dynamic is merely self-satisfaction.”⁴⁸ Instead of considering libido when thinking about the health of marriages, he would prefer that we give preference to “*virtuous self-control*.”⁴⁹ For Rhonheimer, the rhythm method is ideal because it provides an opportunity for the couple to practice such

⁴³ Gifford A. Grobien, “From Taboo to Delight: The Body, Sex, and Love in View of Creation and Eschatology,” in Grobien, *Ethics of Sex*, 207–208.

⁴⁴ Meilaender, “Sex,” 141.

⁴⁵ Rhonheimer, “Toward an Adequate Argument,” 118.

⁴⁶ Rhonheimer, “Toward an Adequate Argument,” 44–45.

⁴⁷ Rhonheimer, “Toward an Adequate Argument,” 110.

⁴⁸ Rhonheimer, “Toward an Adequate Argument,” 110.

⁴⁹ Rhonheimer, “Toward an Adequate Argument,” 92. This echoes the thinking of Paul VI. See especially point 21 on the value of self-discipline in Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae*.

virtuous sexual self-control while also affording enough time in the month to satisfy desire. Unfortunately, he fails to consider the female perspective. As a woman, I can attest to the fact that the female libido is subject to wide variation relative to her fertile window. For women, sex outside this window is a diminished experience and can sometimes be unpleasant.⁵⁰ Exclusive use of the rhythm method does indeed give the wife ample opportunity to practice sexual self-control. Sadly, it also gives her no outlet for her libido at its height, except for those times when the couple feels able to accept another child. This can lead to an unhealthy dynamic in which sex retains its healing purpose for the husband while becoming coldly functional for the wife, robbing her of all three purposes simultaneously.⁵¹ Considering Paul's exhortation that "it is better to marry than to burn with passion" (1 Cor 7:9b), we would be remiss if we did not consider the woman's sexual desire in addition to the man's. Meilaender helpfully reminds us that "sexual love is not simply an act of fulfillment or gratification, but also an act of renunciation; for it directs us away from ourselves toward both the loved one and the next generation."⁵² Thus, the husband's vocational duty to love and care for his wife most certainly includes considering how the timing of their sexual activity impacts her.⁵³ A husband who seeks to honor his vocation and "live with [his wife] in an understanding way, showing honor to [her] as the weaker vessel" (1 Pet 3:7) might advocate using contraceptives temporarily while

⁵⁰ In my research, only two scholarly sources mentioned this issue. See John Warwick Montgomery, "How to Decide the Birth Control Question," in *Slaughter of the Innocents: Abortion, Birth Control, and Divorce in Light of Science, Law, and Theology* (Westchester, IL: Cornerstone, 1981), 20. Also D. Richard Stuckwisch, "Pastoral Considerations of Contraception," in Grobien, *Ethics of Sex*, 112.

⁵¹ A sad example of this exists in the story of Sam and Bethany (née Patchin) Torode. They married in 2000 and published a sweet and hopeful book called *Open Embrace*, which advocated Natural Family Planning (NFP) among Protestants. After having four children, they wrote a joint statement in 2006 withdrawing their support for NFP, stating that it is "a theological attack on women to always require that abstinence during the time of the wife's peak sexual desire (ovulation) for the entire duration of her fertile life, except for the handful of times when she conceives." Unfortunately, the couple was unable to recover from their troubles and divorced in 2009. While their original 2006 statement is no longer available online, I located the quote from it in Mark Oppenheimer, "An Evolving View of Natural Family Planning," *New York Times*, July 8, 2011, <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/09/us/09beliefs.html>. For more insight into their struggles, see also Joy-Elizabeth Lawrence, "When Changing Your Mind Goes Public," *Catapult Magazine*, October 24, 2008, <http://catapultmagazine.com/changing-minds/feature/when-changing-your-mind-goes-public/>.

⁵² Meilaender, "Sex," 117.

⁵³ Richard Stuckwisch was the only source I came across to explicitly frame this issue in terms of vocation. "In love for his wife, the husband considers her welfare, listens carefully to her concerns, and finally exercises his headship and authority to care for her, to bear her burdens, to strengthen and support her in every weakness, to shelter and protect her from the assaults and accusations of the devil, and to cover all her sins and shame with his own honor. *He takes into account not only her bodily health and well-being but also her heart and mind, her soul and spirit.*" Stuckwisch, "Pastoral Considerations of Contraception," 118; emphasis my own.

they are unable to support new children so that the marriage can continue to have a healing, sin-restraining function for her while also upholding the unitive function for them both.⁵⁴

All this raises the question: If the purposes of marriage are in conflict, how should a couple prioritize them? In such cases, Thielicke notes that the three purposes and their relative hierarchy within the order of creation as a “focal point becomes important as a means of orientation.”⁵⁵ He emphasizes that “[d]espite the fact that the whole of the order of creation embraces both parents *and* children, this intrinsic value [of the marriage relationship] must be retained as its focal emphasis. After all, it is one thing to assert that there is a focal emphasis within a totality and quite another thing to say that this totality can be divided as one pleases.”⁵⁶ In this way of thinking, Christian couples seek to balance all three purposes but with a distinct focus on the unitive, since both the procreative and healing purposes flow from that primary purpose. This directly opposes the Augustinian/Roman Catholic view, which sees the unitive purpose of marriage as valid only if it flows from the procreative purpose.⁵⁷ Instead, Christian couples would be wise to see marital sex as an “act of love [that] need not be sought or desired for any reason other than the communion it expresses and embodies.”⁵⁸ From this loving, spouse-focused union, both children and the satisfaction of libido can healthfully and properly result.

VI. Marriage as Depiction of Christ and the Church

John Warwick Montgomery adds to Thielicke’s thinking by insisting that we center our conception of marriage not on the first two chapters of Genesis but on Ephesians 5:22–33, where Paul declares that our marriages are pictures-in-miniature of Christ and the church. If we do this, “marriage cannot be regarded simply as a means (‘Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth’) or unqualifiedly as an

⁵⁴ Of course, there is much more to female happiness than sexual fulfillment. In her fiercely intelligent and witty prose, Roman Catholic writer Mary Eberstadt convincingly argues that widespread contraceptive use has made women exceedingly unhappy. While I tend to agree with her, she speaks from a societal-level perspective, which includes use of hormonal birth control outside of marriage. Since I am speaking to the very specific situation of nonabortifacient contraceptive use within fruitful Christian marriages and am advocating its use only in limited circumstances, much of what she says does not speak directly to my argument. Regardless, her opinion is well worth considering. See Eberstadt, “Vindication of *Humanae Vitae*,” 145–149.

⁵⁵ Thielicke, “Birth Control,” 209.

⁵⁶ Thielicke, “Birth Control,” 208.

⁵⁷ “For in matrimony as well as in the use of the matrimonial rights there are also secondary ends, such as mutual aid, the cultivating of mutual love, and the quieting of concupiscence which husband and wife are not forbidden to consider so long as they are subordinated to the primary end and so long as the intrinsic nature of the act is preserved.” Pius XI, *Casti Connubii*, 47.

⁵⁸ Meilaender, “Sex,” 140–141.

end (“They shall be one flesh”). Rather, it is seen as an *analogy*—indeed, as the best human analogy—of the relationship between Christ and his church.”⁵⁹ This way of viewing marriage guards against separating the purposes of marriage too far by upholding the harmony God always intended. “As Christ’s relation with the church is a *total* love relation, not just a means to an end, so one must not view marriage simply as a procreative [or healing] function.”⁶⁰ The unitive (love) purpose of our marriages must come first, from which the other purposes can flow. Thus, rather than competing with Thielicke’s view regarding marital goods in the Genesis account, Montgomery’s insight into marriage as analogy perfectly complements it. This lends credibility to the biblical consistency inherent in thinking of marriage as having a primary unitive purpose closely wedded with the secondary procreative and healing purposes.

Additionally, viewing marriage through an Ephesians 5 lens highlights the fact that marriage is “truly meaningful only insofar as it reflects the Christ-relationship.”⁶¹ That is to say, Christ’s love for the church is the ultimate model for marriage and is, at the same time, its fulfillment. Christ has not held back one bit of himself from us, his beloved. Likewise, when our marriages are conducted in selfless love for the other—when we give of ourselves completely and receive full acceptance even in our most exposed and vulnerable state—we possess the closest human approximation to God’s deep love and acceptance in Christ that this earthly life has to offer. This approximation, when centered appropriately on Jesus, directs our attention away from itself and “points us to God’s communication of Himself to us in Christ.”⁶² Because of this eschatological reality, we have an even more compelling reason to resist the urge to separate the purposes of marriage too far from one another. Just as Christ does not neglect to give his church gifts to help curb sin (the indwelling Spirit given through Baptism and the Lord’s Supper, the gift of Confession and Absolution, mutual consolation and conversation of the brethren, etc.), so also neither spouse in a Christian marriage may habitually refuse to give him- or herself sexually to the other. Likewise, since Christ does not neglect to beget children in the waters of Baptism through his church, neither is a Christian couple free to refuse to beget their own children.⁶³ We seek to uphold the unitive purpose as

⁵⁹ Montgomery, “How to Decide,” 23.

⁶⁰ Montgomery, “How to Decide,” 24.

⁶¹ Montgomery, “How to Decide,” 24.

⁶² Grobier, “From Taboo to Delight,” 212.

⁶³ Stuckwisch says this well: “In their bearing and rearing of children, there is an image of, a participation in, and a contribution to the Church’s fruitfulness in bearing the children of God by the Gospel of Christ.” Stuckwisch, “Pastoral Considerations of Contraception,” 106.

primary in our earthly marriages so that the secondary purposes may spring forth naturally, just as happens in Christ's union with the church.

VII. Dominion over Creation and Changing Natural Processes

Another issue often heavy on the minds of conscientious Christian couples is whether (and to what degree) it is permissible for mankind to change natural processes in contraceptive decision-making. Again arguing from the order of creation, Thielicke asserts that God's giving Adam and Eve dominion meant that they were expected to make choices that would steward, impact, and even change nature within certain parameters.⁶⁴ They were, in fact, gardeners! Stuckwisch concurs.

Also belonging to the image of God is the dominion that man is given over the earth. That dominion, properly speaking, is a stewardship of faith and love, carried out in the name of the Lord and belonging to the beauty and good order of His creation. *It is not an absolute or open-ended lordship, but a God-given authority over and responsibility for the particular garden where God, the Lord, has placed a man and his wife.* It is required of them, as stewards of God's good creation and good gifts, to be faithful in their care for and administration of that garden.⁶⁵

In this way of thinking, governing nature by changing how the natural process of sexual reproduction proceeds (lessening the likelihood of conception through the use of contraceptives) is analogous to overseeing and guiding natural processes in other contexts, so long as it is done from a stewardship mindset that aims to make choices that are in alignment with God's word. For Thielicke, to believe "that in the matter of procreation everything must be left to chance, which generally is then glorified 'in religious terms as "leaving it to Providence," . . . would not be the . . . responsible attitude appropriate to the claim of the order of creation," but would instead reveal a "bondage to the order of nature."⁶⁶ God gives the earth and our bodies into our care, not so that we must be ruled by them as animals are, but so that we can exercise godly dominion and care for them, utilizing them for the good of our neighbor. Thus, in certain situations, refusing to regulate procreative potential could

⁶⁴ "I move in the direction of the order of creation, not simply by following the order of nature in a functional way, but rather only *as I make the decision of obedience before my Creator and thus forsake determination by nature.* Hence the claim of the order of creation transcends the order of nature and therefore does not permit any identification of the two." Thielicke, "Birth Control," 209; emphasis my own.

⁶⁵ Stuckwisch, "Pastoral Considerations of Contraception," 106; emphasis my own.

⁶⁶ Thielicke, "Birth Control," 210–211.

actually be an abdication of our responsibility to faithfully steward the resources God has entrusted to us.⁶⁷

Even Rhonheimer agrees that we are not subject to the “order of nature” when it comes to begetting children, although he would likely object to my phrasing. He uses very similar reasoning as Thielicke: because man is given dominion over the earth, he is an “‘interpreter of God’s will,’ participating in the Creator’s providence by his own acts of intelligent understanding. . . . Man has to judge regarding what is right or appropriate to do or to omit.”⁶⁸ While Rhonheimer would deny that contraceptives are a God-pleasing way to prevent conception, he takes the same logical path to defend periodic continence as Thielicke does to defend contraceptive use. Despite his best efforts, Rhonheimer fails to argue convincingly that the temporary prevention of pregnancy using contraceptives is fundamentally different from the temporary prevention of pregnancy using continence. In both cases, the couple exercises dominion by regulating family size and spacing through the prevention of conception. Either it is acceptable to plan and space pregnancies by preventing conception, or it is not. Stuckwisch agrees: “deliberatively refraining from marital relations on a particular occasion, or at any given time, for the purpose of avoiding conception is itself another method of ‘contraception.’”⁶⁹ Stuckwisch argues that the means by which conception is prevented is not nearly so important as the motivation behind that prevention. “[T]he avoidance of conception . . . is not always done responsibly, with virtue, in the fear and faith of God. But it may be so. And where and when contraception is used, it ought to be in faith, for the purpose of glorifying God, caring for His creation in peace, and serving the neighbor in love.”⁷⁰

VIII. Procreation, Not Reproduction

At this point, a word of caution is in order. The process of planning a family can very easily lead to thinking of children as products. Helmut Baer, a contemporary Lutheran theologian in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), sees this as a particular danger when we use contraception to make children fit our desires.

⁶⁷ “It may well be that avoiding the likelihood of conception is at times a godly exercise of dominion over the creation. We might compare it to Adam restraining the animals and preventing them from coming into the Garden of Eden, and to his ordering and organizing of the garden, choosing what to plant and what not to plant, cultivating and pruning, and so forth, as a stewardship of that which God entrusted to his care and oversight (Genesis 2:5–20).” Stuckwisch, “Pastoral Considerations of Contraception,” 110.

⁶⁸ Rhonheimer, “Toward an Adequate Argument,” 91.

⁶⁹ Stuckwisch, “Pastoral Considerations of Contraception,” 112.

⁷⁰ Stuckwisch, “Pastoral Considerations of Contraception,” 110.

On the old-fashioned view of contraception, children do not so much satisfy as change our wants. . . . [T]hey come to us on terms we cannot set, meet us in ways that are unexpected, and in doing so both discipline and transform the self. . . . On the modern view of contraception, however, children are components ordered to fit into life plans on the terms of our making. . . . [P]lanning parenthood becomes a vision of freedom grounded in convenience and efficiency.⁷¹

Debra Lee Schaeffer Grime, a medical doctor, obstetrics and gynecology specialist, and LCMS layperson, echoes Baer's concern. She cautions that if we think of children in terms of *reproduction*, we are prone to seeing them as objects we make and thus own or can control. On the other hand, speaking in terms of *procreation* helps us remember that we participate in God's creative process. We do not make children; we beget them. "Making' makes us feel like we have accomplished something, that we are responsible for shaping our lives and families. 'Begetting' forces us to realize that God is shaping our lives and families."⁷² Keeping this in mind, faithful Christians seek to make decisions that remain open to God's direction, allowing him to sanctify us through self-giving service to children. In doing so, we retain a rightful focus on God as King of our lives and times rather than allowing our use of contraceptives (or continence) to provide an illusion of control that we actually do not possess.

IX. Contraception as Adiaphoron?

To better facilitate this focus, Baer advocates that Christians return to a view of contraception as a tool to be used only during difficult situations when the purposes of marriage are in active conflict. He echoes Thielicke in asserting that a couple might decide they are in a difficult situation requiring contraception if "further children would conflict with the overall well-being of the family," which depends on a "complicated interaction of multiple factors, both objective, like financial resources, and subjective, like individual capacities and limitations."⁷³ Because of the myriad situations that might fall under this rubric, Baer says that we cannot devise a one-size-fits-all approach. Rather, "individual husbands and wives [must use] their best

⁷¹ Helmut David Baer, "The Exception to the Rule: A Protestant Thinks about Contraception," *Pro Ecclesia: A Journal of Catholic and Evangelical Theology* 11, no. 4 (2002): 430.

⁷² Debra Lee Schaeffer Grime, "The Ethics of Contraception, Abortion, and Advanced Reproductive Techniques: God's Medical Miracles or the Tower of Babel?," in *Confessional Lutheran Ethics*, ed. Jennifer H. Maxfield and Bethany Preus, Congress on the Lutheran Confessions 5 (Minneapolis: Lutheran Press, 1998), 104.

⁷³ Baer, "Exception to the Rule," 427.

judgment.”⁷⁴ Since “there is no word of God commanding marital relations or forbidding the avoidance of conception at any given time or under every and all circumstances,”⁷⁵ Lutheran Christians know that we are free to follow our Scripture-informed consciences and are not bound to rigid, extrabiblical rules. At the same time, we also “understand that [our] choices, decisions, and actions are a confession of [our] faith and a testimony to and for [our] neighbors.”⁷⁶

Here, consideration of the Lutheran Christian view of adiaphora is instructive. Adiaphora, or “indifferent matters,” are practices neither commanded nor forbidden by God (FC SD X 2).⁷⁷ However, “adiaphora” can be a deceptive term, because often matters that are neither commanded nor forbidden are not actually indifferent to God or to those around us.⁷⁸ Helmut Baer argues along the same lines regarding contraception. Because of God’s command to be fruitful, Baer cautions us against adopting the culture’s view of contraception as a morally indifferent choice. Rather, he advocates that married couples look at contraceptive use as a “matter of conscience . . . subject to objective considerations.”⁷⁹ This means that while the choice of whether to use birth control is a “difficult and troubling situation,” it is nonetheless “a question for which there is a right answer.”⁸⁰

But how might a couple arrive at “the right answer” to a question that falls within the spectrum of adiaphora? When we know God cares deeply about the topic at hand and yet we do not have crystal-clear scriptural guidance as to how to proceed, how do we responsibly exercise our Christian freedom? Here, Charles Arand offers helpful advice. While he discusses how to make decisions about adiaphora in church rites, his advice, nonetheless, is directly applicable to the question at hand. When operating without a clear directive from God, Arand encourages Christians to consider how our potential action (1) confesses the gospel; (2) expresses continuity with universal, catholic church tradition of all times; (3) accounts for contextual sensitivity; and (4) conforms to the consensus of our church body.⁸¹ Applying these considerations to contraception could help couples consider the wider implications

⁷⁴ Baer, “Exception to the Rule,” 427.

⁷⁵ Stuckwisch, “Pastoral Considerations of Contraception,” 110.

⁷⁶ Stuckwisch, “Pastoral Considerations of Contraception,” 113.

⁷⁷ In Kolb and Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 636.

⁷⁸ The Solid Declaration states that “we must not include among the truly free adiaphora or indifferent matters ceremonies that give the appearance or (in order to avoid persecution) are designed to give the impression that our religion does not differ greatly from the papist religion or that their religion were not completely contrary to ours” (FC SD X 5, in Kolb and Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 636).

⁷⁹ Baer, “Exception to the Rule,” 430.

⁸⁰ Baer, “Exception to the Rule,” 430.

⁸¹ Charles P. Arand, “Not All Adiaphora are Created Equal,” *Concordia Journal* 30, no. 3 (July 2004): 156–164.

of their decision. While choices related to contraception are certainly not the same as adiaphoristic church rites and will have different considerations (especially as concerns the individual marriage and family in question), couples can still use Arand's line of thinking as a valuable aide.⁸²

X. Conclusion

In conclusion, the decision to use contraception deserves much more thought and prayer than most modern couples give it. Montgomery reminds us that the "burden of proof rests, then, on the couple who wish to restrict the size of their family; to the extent possible and desirable, all Christian couples should seek to 'bring many sons unto glory.'"⁸³ For this reason, we can value the viewpoints of Augustine, Luther, Chemnitz, the early LCMS, and the Roman Catholic Church. While we reject equating preventing conception with murder, we heed the warning of our spiritual fathers to take seriously God's command to procreate.⁸⁴ Likewise, while we deny that the pleasure inherent in marital sex is nothing more than a happy by-product, understanding Augustine's suspicion of pleasure reminds us "to be cautious about supposing that we can take our own sexual experience as a guide to right order."⁸⁵ Similarly, while we disavow the Roman Catholic "inseparability principle" when applied to each individual sex act, we uphold the principle over the life of a marriage. Understanding the three purposes of marriage and their proper order (the procreative and healing functions flowing out of the unitive), as modeled by Christ's love for the Church (Eph 5:22–33) and exemplified in the creation account, helps us make rightly ordered family-planning decisions. We do this while recognizing that the broken world and our own sinfulness make perfect imitation impossible.

When faced with the inevitable conflict between marriage's purposes, we remember that God charged us with stewarding nature for the benefit of those to whom we have vocational responsibilities. As Thielicke puts it, "man in creation is not merely another natural being, but unlike the other natural being[s] is in a relationship of responsibility to God. . . . [H]e is not simply the passive result of God's 'Let there be,' but rather a personal being vis-à-vis the Creator who addresses him in promise and command and calls him to act in *responsible freedom*."⁸⁶ Not that

⁸² Along similar lines, Stuckwisch advises that "when considering questions of contraception or 'family planning,' we should first of all ask this: What does this confess concerning the Church and her fruitfulness in making disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, in giving birth to the children of God?" Stuckwisch, "Pastoral Considerations of Contraception," 106.

⁸³ Montgomery, "How to Decide," 25.

⁸⁴ As Stuckwisch says, "the actual avoidance of conception does not involve the destruction or murder of an unborn human being." Stuckwisch, "Pastoral Considerations of Contraception," 108.

⁸⁵ Meilaender, "Sex," 130.

⁸⁶ Thielicke, "Birth Control," 209; emphasis my own.

this responsible freedom gives us an easy “out” on this issue, for we acknowledge that each procreative decision has a morally right (i.e., commanded or permissible) answer, even if it may be difficult for the couple to discern and downright impossible for those outside the marriage to judge. Such matters are still “subject to the contextual criteria and moral considerations of faith and love in relation to God and neighbor.”⁸⁷

Because of the difficulties Christians will often have in discerning the best path forward in such challenging cases, it is vital for Christian couples to be part of a sincere, active church family in which they can receive support from fellow Christians and godly pastoral counsel. As Stuckwisch sagely advises, “Matters pertaining to marriage, procreation, and contraception are most properly addressed with personal pastoral care. Every particular situation is different, and in this fallen world there are no pat and easy answers for all the questions and challenges confronting husbands, wives, and families in their life together.”⁸⁸ In these gray areas, we remember that “however he is led to fulfill his personal responsibility before the Lord of the church, the Christian stands free from the shackles of legalism and from the chaos of [libertinism].”⁸⁹ We move freely in Christ’s forgiveness and continued provision, continually praying for the Holy Spirit’s help and guidance.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ Stuckwisch, “Pastoral Considerations of Contraception,” 110.

⁸⁸ Stuckwisch, “Pastoral Considerations of Contraception,” 105.

⁸⁹ Montgomery, “How to Decide,” 27.

⁹⁰ Special thanks to Joshua Cook, for his pastoral guidance, professional encouragement, and sincere friendship.