



Essays



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Natural Family Planning and the Theology of the Body

A New Discourse for Married Couples

Mary Shivanandan

Modern methods of natural family planning (NFP) came on the scene in the midst of the 1960s sexual revolution. The new understanding of love, sexuality, fertility appreciation, gender roles, openness to life, and intimacy that NFP initiated could not find a voice or a language with which to speak to the culture. Furthermore, struggling for legitimacy in the medical-scientific world of family planning, it was forced to adopt some of its reductionist terminology. For example, the effectiveness of a contraceptive family planning method is judged by its ability to prevent pregnancy. If an unintended pregnancy occurs it is called a failure of the method. NFP proponents prefer to call such an event a “surprise pregnancy” because labeling it a failure even tangentially demeans the child who has been conceived.

Natural family planning is unique in being highly effective also for achieving pregnancy, a fact not even considered in contraceptive literature.¹ But NFP is much

¹Natural family planning manuals include sections on achieving pregnancy as an essential. See for example, John and Sheila Kippley, *The Art of Natural Family Planning* (Cincinnati, OH: The Couple to Couple League International, 1996) 297–315; and Evelyn and John Billings, *Teaching the Billings Ovulation Method* (Melbourne, Australia: Ovulation Method Research and Reference Centre of Australia, 1997), 24–35.

more than simply a method of family planning. It is a way of discerning God's plan for the family.² Many couples view it as a "way of life."³ Being inserted in a contraceptive framework has almost totally obscured the fact that NFP itself is an innovation revealing to couples in a new way the riches of the Church's teaching on marriage and family life.⁴ Thanks to John Paul II's development of a theology of the body and renewal of a sacramental vision of marriage, natural family planning has finally found a voice and a language.

A New Voice and a New Language

How does John Paul II's theology of the body provide a new voice? Let us take, first of all, the subject of abstinence or continence, which our culture considers a major stumbling block to the natural methods of family planning. When sociologist Thomasina Borkman was studying the experience of NFP couples, she was puzzled by the many times they spoke of abstinence being difficult yet enhancing the couple's conjugal relationship, because in the language of sexual liberalism all obstacles to sexual pleasure must be removed or the person is repressed. John Paul II, on the contrary, speaks of the language of self-determination for self-governance. And that leads to self-possession in order to become a gift to the other.

John Paul II looks at the problem of chastity from two dimensions, which include the philosophical, both the metaphysical and the phenomenological, and the theological.⁵ In his most extensive philosophic work on sexuality, *Love and Responsibility*, Karol Wojtyła, as the Pope was known before his election, makes two critical statements about chastity: chastity is a requirement of the person and chastity is not sufficient of itself—it must be conditioned by love. Wojtyła takes as his criterion the categorical imperative of Immanuel Kant: "act always in such a way that the other person is the end and not merely the instrument of your action."⁶ This "personalist" principle excludes treating another human being like an object. Unlike animals, the person possesses reason and free will, but more than that the person is a subject on the basis of conscience and consciousness.⁷ He is both aware of his

²John Paul II, citing both *Gaudium et spes* and *Humanae vitae* says, "God the Creator invites the spouses not to be passive operators, but rather 'cooperators or almost interpreters' of His plan (GS, n. 50). In fact, they are called, out of respect for the objective moral order established by God, to an obligatory *discernment of the indications of God's will concerning the family*." "Pope Calls Spouses to a Sense of Responsibility for Love and for Life" (December 14, 1990), *L'Osservatore Romano* (English), December 17, 1990, 1, original emphasis.

³Mary Shivanandan, *Crossing the Threshold of Love: A New Vision of Marriage in the Light of John Paul II's Anthropology* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1999), 256, note 71.

⁴Thomasina Borkman, "A Social Science Perspective of Research Issues for Natural Family Planning," *International Review of Natural Family Planning* 3.4 (Winter 1979): 337–338.

⁵The word "chastity" is preferred to abstinence. The latter implies simply giving up something, a deprivation, while chastity denotes a positive state of purity.

⁶Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Company, 1981), 27–31.

⁷*Ibid.*, 23, 24.

actions and knows that he is aware. Man is a spiritual and incommunicable being to whom the only adequate response is love.

Now, Wojtyla says, in the sexual act the person is both a subject and an object of sexual desire.⁸ The object of sexual desire is the body, which naturally stimulates the senses. To avoid remaining at the level of the body and sex of the person, desire must move towards love. It is the role of continence to prevent the process of moving from sensual desire to carnal lust. Sensual desire, which is a good in itself, tends to overwhelm the will. If this happens the subject loses sight of the value of the person and seeks only sexual gratification.⁹ Wojtyla notes that this is a particular temptation of the male. The periods of continence the couple practice in NFP greatly strengthen the power to place sensual desire at the service of love. Far from being a negative value, continence helps to bring about the “freedom of the gift.”

The liberation of the person through chastity takes place not just exteriorly but in the depth of the will. It ensures that loving kindness takes precedence over the desire for enjoyment. Wojtyla states that “only the chaste man and woman are capable of true love.”¹⁰ NFP couples experience this liberation. For husbands the self-mastery brings a sense of accomplishment, while women appreciate knowing that they are loved not just for their bodies, but for themselves. As one couple expressed it:

In the course of time we realized that what we had tried to avoid in our quest for oneness, in our search for peace and love; what we had discounted and turned away from, was to become the very thing which has the most value for us. Now we are looking to abstinence, to NFP, to gain real freedom in our lives. . . . We have come up with a new definition of abstinence; we decided that abstinence for us, from now on, is the answer to our search for freedom. Freedom in lovemaking and in our desire to be one in our coupleness, in our Catholic sacramental life as a couple.¹¹

As any couple knows, self-mastery for self-gift is not easy. It can be such a challenge that our society does not believe that most people are capable of controlling their sexual urges. John Paul II brings the light of the Gospel to bear on the human condition. He calls a key text for the theology of the body Matthew 5:27–28: “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” No longer is it sufficient to avoid the physical act of adultery, as in the Old Testament. Now the interior reduction of the woman to a sexual object alone can be construed as the sin of adultery. Christ’s words bring a new ethos, the ethos of the

⁸Ibid., 147.

⁹Ibid., 148–151.

¹⁰Ibid., 163, 169.

¹¹Testimony given at a workshop on NFP at St. Mary’s Abbey, Morristown, NJ, 1979. *Natural Family Planning: Nature’s Way, God’s Way*, eds. Anthony Zimmerman, Francois Guy, and D. Tettamanzi (Milwaukee, WI: De Rance, 1980), 26–28. Other testimonies are included in Shivanandan, *Crossing the Threshold of Love*, 261–268.

redemption, which calls for transformation of man's heart. His death and resurrection restore grace and "demand that man should enter into his full image."¹²

It is only within the context of man's lofty calling that purity of heart—chastity—takes on its true meaning. Sins of the flesh are sins of the body, as St. Paul relates. "The body," says John Paul II, "and it alone, is capable of making visible what is invisible: the spiritual and divine. It was created to transfer into the visible reality of the world the mystery hidden since time immemorial in God, and thus be a sign of it."¹³ And that mystery is the destiny of man and woman to participate in divine Trinitarian communion.¹⁴ With this understanding of the body and its role as the "primordial sacrament" of creation, the Christian can never devalue the body. In fact John Paul II says that the Christian is always in danger of not valuing the body highly enough.¹⁵

The Pope stresses over and over again the intrinsic innocence of the body. Although concupiscence becomes visible in an act of the body, its true origin is the heart. When Adam and Eve sinned they cast God out of the heart. Concupiscence is the fruit of this break in the Covenant.¹⁶ The body is no longer subordinated to the spirit. The lust of the body especially threatens the self-mastery of the person. Where before the body in its masculinity and femininity had been the foundation of their communion, it now became a barrier.¹⁷

The Pope distinguishes between psychological and theological lust, which is important in understanding the nature of chastity. Concupiscence, or the lust of the body, is not sinful in itself. This is the purely psychological interpretation of lust and is important in establishing the fundamental innocence of the body. But it is not enough. It needs to be completed by a theological analysis of lust. Christ's words in Matthew 5:27–28 point to "the organic relationship between lust (as an act) and the lust of the flesh as a permanent disposition derived from man's sinfulness."¹⁸ This permanent disposition resulting from the Fall induces the man to see in the woman only sexual values, in other words he views her as a potential object for the satisfaction of his sexual desires. In this way concupiscence, while not sinful in itself, becomes what traditionally has been called the "germ of sin." But, and this is important, *it only becomes sin when the will consents to it.* In *Love and Responsibility*, John Paul makes the critical observation that concupiscence arises naturally in the body as a result of external stimuli. If the person does not consent to it, that does not mean that the urge will immediately disappear because the body has its own dynamic. This is where the practice of self-mastery or continence is so important. It

¹²John Paul II, *The Theology of the Body: Human Love in the Divine Plan* (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 1997), April 23, 1980.

¹³Ibid., February 20, 1980.

¹⁴Ibid., February 20, 1980, and September 8, 1982.

¹⁵Ibid., October 22, 1980.

¹⁶Ibid., April 30, 1980.

¹⁷Ibid., June 4, 1980.

¹⁸Ibid., October 8, 1980. See *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nn. 1263–1264.

keeps in check the response to lustful impulses. Over and above the practice of virtue, purity of heart is a gift of the Holy Spirit. The grace of redemption gives Man the power to “control his body in holiness and honor” (1 Thes 4:3–5).

This is the true meaning of a person-centered sexuality. Far from being person-centered, sexual liberalism makes the other an object of sexual gratification. NFP couples experience these truths. One wife said:

For the sake of our relationship, I was required to sacrifice my health.... I felt as if I were an object and not an equal partner in our marriage.... He (my husband) came to the marriage bed as he was while I was required to alter myself. I was not allowed to give myself freely in our marriage relationship, not to experience fully the physical aspect of our love.¹⁹

As for the disparagement of the Judeo-Christian view as body-centered, it is the glory of the Christian view, as John Paul II points out, to give full value to the body and sex. For through the Incarnation of Christ “the body entered theology [that is, the science, the subject of which is divinity] through the main door.”²⁰ Even in their bodies man and woman in some way image God. The body is not set over against the spirit but *expresses* invisible spiritual realities.

Eros and Agape

But what about sexual pleasure? Does not the emphasis on abstinence deny the goodness of sexual desire? Paul VI spoke of our culture’s preoccupation with sexual experience. He sensed that in some way it was seen as “the last refuge of a sacred power.”²¹ In this area too John Paul II is speaking to the culture in the theology of the body. Far from denigrating the role of passion in the sexual relationship, he has, in fact, restored passion to its rightful place in conjugal love.

As revolutionary as Augustine’s theology of sexuality was for its time, he was unable to see libido itself as without sin even in marriage.²² Aquinas, drawing on Aristotle’s anthropology, was able to view sexual desire as a natural inclination towards sexual union ordered to procreation before it was distorted by concupiscence resulting from original sin. Yet he retained a cautious attitude towards sexual passion per se since it overwhelms reason. In the marital act, he allowed that “although for the moment man is not being directed, he was previously directed by his reason.”²³

¹⁹Shivanandan, *Crossing the Threshold of Love*, 261.

²⁰John Paul II, *Theology of the Body*, April 2, 1980.

²¹Paul VI refers to a “destructive eroticism” which “represents an aberration, and it should, at least, alert us to the distressful state of a materialistic civilization that still retains an obscure realization there there is to be found, as it were, in this domain of mystery the last refuge of a sacred power.” “Shall we be able to rescue it from an engulfing sensuality?” *Good News for Married Love: Address of Pope Paul VI to the Teams of Our Lady*, May 4, 1970 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1974), 13.

²²Augustine states: “While continence is of greater merit, it is no sin to render the conjugal debt, but to exact it beyond the need for generation is a venial sin.” *De bono conjugali*, ch. 7.

²³St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, supplement, Q. 41.3, reply 6.

John Paul II, on the contrary, sees *eros* as having a vital role to play in the conjugal relationship. In *Love and Responsibility* he makes the statement that the sexual urge has a transcendent or spiritual source. It does not arise because a man and a woman are attracted to each other. Rather it belongs to the very nature of the person as a relational being. He describes it as “something even more basic than the psychological and physiological attributes of man and woman in themselves, though it does not manifest itself or function without them.”²⁴ The sex urge arises as a consequence of our “urge to completion.” Far from regarding sex as sinful and passion as a defect, John Paul II sees *eros* as greatly aiding the total self-gift of the spouses when it is combined with *ethos*.²⁵

“Where passion,” he says, “enters into the whole of the most profound energies of the spirit, it can also become a creative force. In this case, however, it must undergo a radical transformation.”²⁶ It needs the ethos of redemption. The ethos of redemption incorporates “*eros* [as] the interior force that attracts man toward what is true, good and beautiful.”²⁷ Only self-mastery which the spouses acquire from virtuous effort and the aid of the Holy Spirit can bring about a “mature spontaneity.” NFP couples begin to acquire this spontaneity, as a couple from Los Angeles discovered:

NFP is a discipline, sex is a discipline, love is a discipline. What it really comes down to is communion. Intercourse can be a very singles activity. I can get my satisfaction; she hers. It is not the idea of climaxing at the same time, but are we giving ourselves completely to one another, committing to each other our bodies, our minds, our hearts, our souls? That’s what we are as a sacrament and that’s what God wants us to be.²⁸

Masculinity, Femininity, and the Language of the Body

“Marriage,” says John Paul II, “corresponds to the vocation of Christians only when it reflects the love which Christ the Bridegroom gives to the Church his Bride, and which the Church (resembling the ‘subject’ wife, that is completely given) attempts to return to Christ. This is redeeming love, love as salvation, the love with which man from eternity has been loved by God in Christ.”²⁹ That love presupposes

²⁴Wojtyla, *Love and Responsibility*, 49.

²⁵John Paul II, *Theology of the Body*, November 5, 1980.

²⁶Ibid., September 10, 1980. Linda Sabbath describes just such an integration: “On the genital level it’s something like acid rock, you know, breaking all the instruments, a certain kind of pleasurable violence, and then when it comes into the heart it’s something like Bach and then when it goes beyond that it goes almost into ultra sound. The music becomes so refined, so delicate, so perfect, it is almost not heard.... Then it is pure love in that trinity of the two people and Christ.” Mary Shivanandan, *Challenge to Love* (Bethesda, MD: KM Associates, 1984), 102.

²⁷John Paul II, *Theology of the Body*, November 5, 1980.

²⁸Shivanandan, *Challenge to Love*, 108.

²⁹John Paul II, *Theology of the Body*, August 18, 1982. Note the quotation marks indicating that “subject” does not mean inequality but the way the wife receives the love of the bridegroom. Additionally, Angelo Scola develops the concept of asymmetrical unity well in “The Nuptial Mystery at the Heart of the Church,” *Communio* 25.4 (Winter 1998): 630–662.

unity in difference, what is called an asymmetrical unity. It is Christ who initiates love for his bride the Church by giving Himself up for her, and it is the Church's part as the feminine bride to respond to Christ's love. The analogy with human marriage illuminates the way man and woman are to love each other. Far from seeing the text of Ephesians 5:21–33 as demeaning to women, John Paul II finds in it an affirmation of everything both man and woman are, as well as the essence of their communion of persons, which is love.

The text reveals the radical way that the husband is to give himself up for his wife as Christ gave himself up for the Church, literally translated “handed himself over,” a phrase that brings to mind Christ's passion.³⁰ He is to love her as his own body. The passage ends with the exhortation, “let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband” (Eph 5:33). The asymmetrical unity is borne out in the sexual relationship. The sexologists Masters and Johnson have shown that the woman needs the commitment of the spouse in marriage to fully surrender in the sexual relationship.³¹ When a man commits to marriage he is surrendering himself in a radical way. As John Paul II says, the mutual submission is an experiencing of love. It denotes the different ways man and woman are called to love each other. The man, having first received God's love, is called to love first and the woman responds by loving in return.³² The language of the body itself, says John Paul II, speaks a language of which it is not the author.³³ Respecting his wife's fertility is one of the fundamental ways a husband loves his wife.

The surrender of the woman is never at the expense of her subjectivity. The Pope is at pains to point out the bisubjectivity both in the analogy of the head-body relationship and the one-flesh union of Christ and the Church. The Church remains always a separate subject, as does the wife. Only, in fact, if the wife is a fully self-determining subject can there be a true communion of persons.³⁴ If the wife is not treated as a subject, but more like an object by the husband, the communion of persons cannot image Trinitarian love.

Far from instituting a double standard in the sexual relationship, natural family planning eliminates it. Above all, NFP is a joint method of family planning. Both are called to respect the fertility cycle of the woman. Both are called to marital chastity. Contraceptive intercourse, on the other hand, although it purports to remove the double standard by freeing women to engage in promiscuous sex without consequences, does so at the expense especially of the woman's bodily integrity.

³⁰See Mary Shivanandan, “Feminism and Marriage: A Reflection on Ephesians 5: 21–33,” *Diakonia* 29.1 (1996): 5–22.

³¹Masters and Johnson give the following advice to the husband: “He must give of himself to his wife primarily for her pleasure and then must allow himself to be lost in the warmth and depth of her response.... In brief, if a man is to get the essence of a woman's sensual warmth, he must give of himself to her.” William H. Masters and Virginia Johnson, *Human Sexual Inadequacy* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1970), 19.

³²John Paul II, *Theology of the Body*, September 1, 1982.

³³*Ibid.*, January 12, 1983.

³⁴*Ibid.*, August 25, 1982.

Procreation and the Language of the Body

Planned Parenthood, environmentalists, and others have asked us to believe that it is our civic duty to contracept in order to protect the planet, to ensure the health and well-being of women, and at the same time to give women the freedom that is their due after millenia of oppression. Only if women are in control of their bodies, it is believed, will they be able to take their due place in society. But love is designed to be fruitful. As Aquinas says, “*bonum diffusum sui*.” In the Trinity the love of the Father and the Son bears fruit in a Third who is the bond of love and a person.

It is important to explain to couples that the Church, while praising prudent generosity in childbearing, is not against spacing of births, or even as *Humanae vitae* (n. 10) states, avoiding another pregnancy indefinitely for just and serious reasons.³⁵ The Church’s concern is with the context and manner in which this is done. It must be against the “vast background” of marriage as the primordial sacrament and as a sacrament of the new creation. Only a total self-gift can image the divine communion of persons and the union of Christ and the Church. Procreation is an intrinsic dimension of the body-person.³⁶ To withhold the gift of fertility, as in contraceptive intercourse, is to falsify the language of the body, which is the substratum of the spouses’ consent to give themselves totally to each other.

As *Familiaris consortio* recalls, fertility is a blessing, given at the creation of man and woman, and it signifies a sharing in God’s creative power. The Church believes that human life is “always a splendid gift.” It is “that ‘Yes’ and that ‘Amen’ who is Christ himself.”³⁷ In the “Letter to Families,” John Paul II calls the birth of a child a “paschal sign.” “Just as the resurrection of Christ is the manifestation of life beyond the threshold of death, so too the birth of an infant is a manifestation of life, which is always destined, through Christ, for that ‘fullness of life’ which is in God himself.”³⁸ Spouses are called to “read ... the ‘twofold significance of the marriage act’ and also ‘the inseparable connection between the unitive significance and the

³⁵From the beginning of his papacy John Paul II has given special encouragement to those engaged in the natural family planning movement. In 1982, addressing participants in an NFP training course in Rome, he said: “The work of investigating, perfecting and teaching the natural methods of regulation of fertility is therefore of great importance. For this reason I want to say a word of encouragement to all who work in this field, exhorting them not to cease their investigations.” “The Church Is Grateful for the Help You Offer Married Couples” (July 3, 1982), *L’Osservatore Romano* (English), July 12, 1982, 4. Ten years later in 1992, he said: “It is important to publicize the fact that *the methods which the Church finds moral and acceptable are today receiving the support of ever new scientific confirmations*.... I wish to encourage the Church’s pastors and other Catholics—doctors, marriage counselors, teachers, and married couples themselves—to promote a ‘broader, more decisive and more systematic effort to make the natural methods of regulating fertility known, respected and applied’ (*Familiaris consortio*, n. 35).” “A True Contradiction Cannot Exist between Divine Laws of Transmitting Life and of Fostering Love” (December 11, 1992), *L’Osservatore Romano* (English), December 16, 1992, 6.

³⁶John Paul II, *Familiaris consortio* (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 1981), n. 28.

³⁷*Ibid.*, n. 30.

³⁸John Paul II, “Letter to Families,” *Origins* 23.37 (March 3, 1994), n. 11.

procreative significance of the marriage act.”³⁹ Objectively, natural family planning is open to life because it introduces no barrier to the transmission of life. That is the ontological dimension. The couple is also called in the subjective, psychological dimension to be open to the possibility of life with a generous spirit.⁴⁰

Monitoring the signs of fertility and living with the natural rhythms of the cycle often induces couples to rethink their intention to avoid another birth. Testimonies in natural family planning newsletters continually confirm this change. “NFP has brought me into a greater awareness of my own body and its fertility cycle. I have come to a great reverence of the creative power of sexuality.... We might have been tempted to delay childbearing had not using NFP opened our hearts to children.... Children are a gift, a blessing, not a chore.”⁴¹

Motherhood

In his *Theology of the Body* John Paul II highlights especially motherhood as the fulfillment of what it means to be a woman. “The mystery of femininity is manifested and revealed,” he writes, “completely by means of motherhood.”⁴² The body also reveals the man as potentially a father, but it is in the woman’s body that conception and gestation take place. He notes the praise that has resounded down through the ages of “‘the womb that bore you and the breasts that you sucked’ (Luke 11:27) ... as a eulogy of motherhood, of femininity, of the female body in its typical expression of creative love.”⁴³ This is one of the few occasions when the Pope mentions breastfeeding as integral to a theology of the body.

For NFP proponents breastfeeding is a vital component of a natural method. Not only is it effective in spacing pregnancies, but it benefits the mother-child relationship in numerous ways. Dr. Robert Jackson and others have shown how nursing contributes substantially to the physical, psychological, and even spiritual wellbeing of both mother and child.⁴⁴ Although John Paul II has not delved into the subject of breastfeeding as an intrinsic component of a theology of the body, he has, it seems to me laid the theological groundwork especially in *Mulieris dignitatem*. “Motherhood,” he says, “has been introduced into the order of the covenant that God made with humanity in Jesus Christ.”⁴⁵ He attributes to motherhood “from the beginning a special openness to the new person.”⁴⁶ Although both share parenthood, it is especially “linked to the personal structure of the woman.”⁴⁷

³⁹Idem, *Theology of the Body*, July 11, 1984.

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Shivanandan, *Crossing the Threshold of Love*, 262.

⁴²John Paul II, *Theology of the Body*, March 12, 1980.

⁴³Ibid.

⁴⁴Robert Jackson, *Human Ecology: A Physician’s Advice on Human Life* (Petersham, MA: St. Bede’s Publications, 1990). See especially 32–34.

⁴⁵John Paul II, *Mulieris dignitatem*, *Origins* 18.17 (October 6, 1988), n. 19.

⁴⁶Ibid., n. 18.

⁴⁷Ibid.

Falsification of the Language of the Body

John Paul II speaks of the falsification of the language of the body, which occurs when the human couple deliberately refuses commitment by engaging in unions outside of marriage or withholds the gift of fertility which belongs to the total gift of self within marriage. Premarital and extramarital sex (fornication and adultery), as well as contraception, fail to speak the true language of the body. While verbally professing unconditional love, their bodies in fact belie their actions. Any lie, as philosopher Josef Pieper says, obscures the very truth of reality.⁴⁸ So powerfully has the alternative reality proposed by the secular humanists seduced our culture that the majority of couples are unable to perceive it as anything but the norm. Nothing short of a conversion can wean them from its all-embracing grip.

Some come to natural family planning classes out of frustration with technological methods, or to achieve pregnancy. Others, again a tiny minority, come out of commitment to the teachings of the Church. Yet others who adopt a “natural” lifestyle are drawn to a method free of chemicals. Yet even these may not adopt the full “way of life” that NFP demands.⁴⁹ Those who do have found that it has the power to transform themselves and their marital relationship.⁵⁰ They experience the joy of living the truth of the body and sexuality. These continually struggle to articulate what they experience to bring the good news to others. Now they have the language of the theology of the body.

By restoring the truth of the sublime meaning of Christian marriage, John Paul II has provided the new discourse for the Church’s teaching on responsible parenthood. Small groups are already forming to study this theology in many parts of the country, often led by NFP practitioners. There is great hope that the conversions already being recorded in these groups will multiply.⁵¹ In doing so they will help to form a renewed Christian cultural-linguistic milieu manifesting a true civilization of life and love.

⁴⁸Josef Pieper, *Abuse of Language, Abuse of Power* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992), 15. There he speaks of “public discourse becoming ‘detached from the notions of truth and reality.’ ... The place of authentic reality is taken over by a fictitious reality; my perception is indeed still directed toward an object, but it is a *pseudoreality*, deceptively appearing as being real, so much so that it becomes almost impossible any more to discern the truth.” *Ibid.*, 33. This, indeed, is what has happened in both public discourse and private behavior in the area of sexuality in our culture as a result of the lie of contraception.

⁴⁹The family planning field calls methods that combine monitoring of the fertility cycle and the use of barrier methods during the fertile time “fertility awareness methods,” in contrast to NFP which requires only abstinence during the fertile period. Technical Guidance/Competence Working Group and WHO/Family Planning and Population Unit, “Family Planning Methods: New Guidance,” *Population Reports*, Series J, no. 44 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins School of Public Health, Population Information Program, October 1996), 28.

⁵⁰Shivanandan, *Crossing the Threshold of Love*, 267.

⁵¹Women Affirming Life has published a group study guide on the theology of the body called *A New Language* (Boston, MA: Women Affirming Life, 2002). Out of the ten to twelve women participating in one of the first groups, two women gave up contraception.