

“LIFE, FAMILY AND FREEDOM” CONFERENCE

Sexuality – a Gift for Life

Given at the World Congress of Families
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The sexual revolution which has disrupted family and social life depends not only on ideas but upon a thing: contraception. Family planners admit that existing methods are failing to prevent pregnancy but continue to promote them in aggressive sex education. Their vulnerability can be exploited to teach an alternative vision of sexuality which not only respects human nature but would do much to restore the goods of family life and the well-being of society.

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It is a very great honour for me to have been asked all the way from England to come and speak to you. I would like particularly to thank Babette Francis, not only for inviting me but for giving me my title “Sexuality – a Gift for Life”. So much is said in just a few words:

Sexuality – that means male and female, not 56 gender identities as I believe are now recognised on Facebook. You may not know that Germany alone boasts 200 professors of “gender”.

Gift tells us that sexuality is a given. We don’t choose it, nor can we change it. Gift also implies something beautiful, valuable, designed to give pleasure. It suggests that the Giver has purpose.

For Life has I believe three connotations:

- new life (babies, children);
- living life well, or being full of life; and
- lasting for the *whole* of life.

So important is the gift of sexuality that each of us is marked with it in a very obvious way. We are instantly recognisable as man or woman, boy or girl, even at a distance or on a telephone. When I see the contrast between my own sons and daughter I wonder what more God could have done to show that men and women are distinct and yet of like dignity. It is not just a functional difference, but affects the whole of us, body, mind and spirit. In this extraordinary way, we are at once complete, and designed for communion. In fact, our bodies are inexplicable without understanding the possibilities of the sexual act, of pregnancy and of child raising.

Sex really is the glue which holds not just families but the whole of society together. It is such a remarkable gift that nobody but God could possibly have invented it. Strange that it is treated as something that God cheats us of.

We have already been hearing how deeply troubled our societies are and how the sexual revolution has broken the family unit apart. This didn’t just happen. Ideas were planted right back in history and can be traced to the Enlightenment, Malthusianism, Eugenics, Communism, Feminism, Homosexuality, and, of course, to the latest –ism, Genderism. There are so many –isms floating about that it is easy to forget that the sexual revolution is unlike other cultural revolutions because it doesn’t depend just upon ideas.

It also depends upon a thing, and that thing is contraception. Contraception attacks the nucleus of our sexuality, that mysterious centre of our being where life-giving meets love-making. Tear them apart physically and you touch the spiritual, emotional and mental as well. The effects have proved to be explosive.

It's easier to see quite how much havoc contraception has caused if you imagine the world without it. Marriage, family and social life would all begin to fall back into place again. Trial marriages would suddenly become unfashionable – and the whim that adults should encourage children to be sexually active would disappear. STDs, infertility, abortion would all drop back to numbers we haven't seen for decades. More couples would marry, younger, and society would begin to recover the sense of the child as a gift.

I am not pretending that all society's problems would be healed – original sin is too pervasive for that. But what I am saying is that if you tackle society's many problems without looking at contraception you will be tearing off the head of a weed without getting at the roots. Challenging contraception may appear daunting: we know that it has become integral to the way society runs. Think rather that it is encouraging: faced with so many problems, we have something very specific to target. I shall spend the rest of this talk enlarging on this idea.

The sexual revolution was brought in on the back of the Pill, society's supposed big panacea. But the Pill has proved to be no such thing. We have just heard Dr (Angela) Lanfranchi mention its connection with breast cancer. And bad side-effects don't rest there. Read the cautionary notes contained in any Pill packet and you get some idea of what women are being asked to swallow.

We shouldn't be surprised at these risks because altering nature is a risky business. Look, for instance, at the force of gravity, or the speed of light. Scientists tell us that if either changed by a miniscule amount the world would fall apart. Human beings are at the summit of God's Creation, designed, if possible, with even greater care. Is it right to assume that we can improve on our nature? Did God, who is Love, God, who is Creator, get it wrong when he put together in one act our powers to procreate and to make love?

Some years ago my husband and I invited Dr John Henryⁱ to stay with us. He was one of the UK's best known toxicologists, the man put on the radio when a child had swallowed a bottle of bleach. He was fascinating to be with as he had such curiosity in everything about him, and knew the properties of each flower in our tangled garden. He told me that most of his patients had poisoned themselves in some way – he was particularly upset by the damage young people suffer through the use of recreational drugs. "You cannot cheat the body," he said. "If you try to shortcut its workings, or distort it for some apparent advantage, the body always fights back." I asked him about the Pill. "That is another social drug," he replied. "It's an illusion to think that there can be a 'perfect' contraceptive. There is none, and never will be."

It is actually very difficult to shut down fertility on a temporary basis. Last year, when I was in Australia for the World Congress of Families, I picked up a copy of your MX freebie in the Sydney metroⁱⁱ. "Baby by mistake", screamed the headline. "Half of all pregnancies in Australia aren't planned, with young women sticking with the most unreliable forms of contraception." That's interesting, I thought to myself. I wonder what those are. "A national study by Queensland University and Newcastle University,

designed to combat unintended pregnancy, has found the contraceptive pill and condoms were the most common methods of contraceptive among women aged 18 to 23. But they are also the least effective.” Even more interesting. Those are the very contraceptives that are still being pushed at our young in England.

And this year English studies have come out with like concerns. First BPAS, or the British Pregnancy Advisory Service (which you may guess is a big abortion provider), reported that, of 150,000 women over age 15 who had attended their clinics in the last three years, 66% of those presenting for abortion had been using contraception at the time they conceived, with 40% of these being on the pillⁱⁱⁱ. Then, in April, Marie Stopes produced similar figures.^{iv}

What interests me is that, while all three studies asked for replacements for the Pill and condom, none of them agreed on what those replacements might be. One suggested long-acting hormones, and another the coil. There is nothing new in either method, and if they really are so suitable they would have been taken up long ago. Both in fact involve unpleasant procedures and have potentially serious side-effects. BPAS, perhaps realising that young girls are unlikely to tip up voluntarily for such things^v, especially in advance of first intercourse, professed to be “excited by research into a ‘pericoital’ pill that women could take at the time of sex”. I looked up the given link. It was clear that the project is still a long way from realisation.

The fact is the contraceptionists’ cupboard is bare.

Their methods fail, especially among the young, even in their basic purpose: to avoid pregnancy. The reasons for their failure are not always medical. They are often social. But if a social drug fails for social reasons the problem is no less real. What none of the studies considered was the risk of their methods to health, to future fertility, or to long-term bonding. This, however, has to be our concern, and the concern of any conscientious policy maker and educator of the young.

I should say here that we have to be quite clear: those who are suffering most at the contraceptionists’ hands are the most vulnerable in society. A major study sponsored by the UK Government found that girls from social class V (unskilled manual) are ten times more prone to becoming pregnant than girls in social class I (professional), a risk multiplied by those living in care or being born to a single mother^{vi}. It is these same young people who are failing to marry in later life. Jonathan Doyle, who is I am sure well known to many of you, came from your country to ours earlier this year and said that marriage is in danger of becoming the preserve of the middle classes. It is not so much divorce which is the problem, but the formation of serial relationships which never mature into marriage at all.

What did the Pill promise?

- Happily bonded marriages, with children when they are wanted.

What have we got?

- Bonding when it is inappropriate, but not when it is needed; and
- Children when they are not wanted, but not when they are.

We are in the frightening position of having become a society moulded round a mechanism which doesn't work.

Contraception is sometimes lauded as though it is a prized good in its own right. In fact, of course, it is not contraception that most ordinary people want. Many dislike or even fear it, which is why they resort to sterilisation at ever younger ages. No, what most people are actually searching for is love without worries, to be able to have children, but also to be able to enjoy sex without fearing their arrival betimes.

And this is perfectly normal. In fact, God made us for it. He could have made women like animals who only attract males when they are in heat. He didn't want that, because he made man and woman in his own image, not just to breed but to bond, and to refresh the bond through sex.

Looked at another way, one can see that he has also given us the ability really to will another child with him, actively to pro-create, not just to be an unthinking tool. We can recognise times of peak fertility, and using them consciously we can co-operate as closely as may be with God in giving life to another human being. Being free to co-operate means being free to hold back on any particular occasion – freedom is part of God's gift. In practice, without artificial intervention, a combination of desire during the fertile time, and increasing trust in providence, tends to encourage couples to want more children.

We have now had fifty years of the Pill. But in those years something else also been happening. Little seen to begin with, often carried out by an individual here, a brave professional there, there has been growing up a vision of sexuality that has never been equalled. We know about the biology of reproduction, but we are also learning about the sexual chemistry of the brain, the economics of the family, the distinct roles of male and female and so much more. We are also plumbing the rich spiritual depths of sexuality, led by St John Paul's Theology of the Body, which is an offering not just to Catholics but to all people of good will.

So in our counter-revolution, because that is what has already begun, we have a wealth of material to draw upon, already modelled by faithful families scattered in different countries. Our task isn't just to protect their rights, important though this is. It is to bring our knowledge of family to everyone, religious and non-religious alike, even to the demonstrators outside these doors.

How do we do it? Our opponents have been successful so why not learn from them.

Three characteristics stand out: their use of language, their organisation, and their targeting of the next generation.

Language is key to the communication of ideas. Anti-life groups are past masters at twisting it for their own ends, introducing terms like "reproductive health", "gender", "parents 1 and 2". We can and should object to these, but why not also go in on the attack, especially where they are vulnerable? Why not improve on the phrase "saving sex for marriage" by calling it "saving sex for the best sex"? Why not puncture their "modern means of contraception" by calling it "Sixties' technology", "outdated science", "environmentally destructive"?

Why are we so coy on contraception? Why do we allow it to retain a kind of glamour as though it is some desirable forbidden fruit? Why do we allow the world to continue treating it as a Catholic issue, when its harm applies to everybody? In fact, why do we keep silent at all^{vii}?

Organisation. The sexual revolution hasn't come about by accident. It operates internationally, with a small number of people targeting key organisations. The pro-life and pro-family movements are gaining ground. There would be no hammering at these doors if we were not making a mark. However, and certainly in a country like the UK, if we are to make inroads into the state institutions, the media, the medical establishment and especially into schools, we need greater numbers and nothing less than a grassroots change of culture is likely to work. The obvious place to start is in our various churches and places of worship. Just imagine what an impact it could make if all those who fill our pews were woken up to the truths we are discussing here.

The young, which is the area of my own work and so I shall spend more time on it.

Every ideology targets the young, and the population controllers have done so with breathtaking audacity. They have walked in on our children in the name of "bringing down teenage pregnancy". Family planners may know that their wares don't work. This doesn't stop them acting as though they do and demanding to get at children at ever younger ages. Early sexual experimentation, as I have already mentioned, impacts upon later bonding and fertility. And so, in the name of bringing down teenage pregnancy, we are in fact preparing society for an arguably greater sexual problem, that of a plethora of lonely, unattached adults. Dr van Gend has already shown us today the link with euthanasia.

Over thirty years ago, in 1981, Christine Vollmer, well known to many of you as a leading campaigner for the family, also wrestled with the problem of teenage pregnancy. It was very real to her: her Venezuelan prolife association had been approached to help some pregnant girls, and she thought there must be some way in which to prevent others falling into their predicament. Talking to the girls, and later to a group of lads, she uncovered the same yearnings for lasting, total love that we all have. These yearnings are hard wired into what it is to be human. Everybody, boy and girl alike, seeks esteem, happiness, success, but many young no longer know how to achieve them. There has been a massive breakdown in the transmission of the values which lead to a well-grounded life. Without these values, it is difficult to find the way through the emotional and physical upheavals which are a normal part of growing up. Add to this the unhappiness of broken homes, and the carnal temptations of which we are all aware, and it is easy to lose the way.

So Christine set about creating a completely new type of sex education programme which she called: *Alive to the World*. We are sexual beings through and through so if you are going to teach sexuality correctly you have to address the entire person: the body, the mind, the emotions (which are both physical and spiritual), the will, and also the imagination. The imagination is very important. I once went to a lecture given by a well known Jesuit to a conference of Catholic Headteachers^{viii}. He pointed out that we have all been given a spiritual imagination which is designed to be filled with God and his works. If there is no God in our lives, we are not left with a vacuum. Instead, the imagination becomes filled with all sorts of other things, and as an example he showed

us a range of computer game avatars and then pictures of the pathetic young people who controlled them. He could have shown us pornography.

Christine consulted a wide range of professionals in preparing her programme, [*Alive to the World*](#). It was clear that so different an approach had to begin with the youngest, with primary school children. She captures their attention by using stories, so that children in a series of books explain qualities like honesty, respect, or grit through their various mishaps and adventures. All the way through, the importance of family and marriage are emphasised. By preparing children to be good family members, they are also given a healthy attitude to work and citizenship, and so Christine developed a complete programme of what we in England call PSHE – Personal, Social, Health Education.

In the last fifteen years, *Alive to the World* has spread throughout Latin America, where it is bringing marked improvement in general school behaviour and encouraging signs on pregnancies. It is now going to South Korea, Hungary, Germany, Africa, Poland and other places. You will find the books from the UK, for students and for teachers, at the back of the hall^{ix}.

What *Alive to the World* doesn't do is teach the intimacy of sexuality in a class context.

"The parents do that," she explained to me. "But they don't," I protested. "And what's more, most can't." I had already discovered as a former Natural Family Planning teacher how little people know about the biology of fertility. Fewer still know about the sexual chemistry of the brain. And so it was that, with Christine's encouragement, I found myself writing [*Sexuality Explained: a Guide for Parents and Children*](#)^x. Like *Alive to the World*, it is not religious but uses stories to make the subject easily approachable. By starting with biology, it engages the reader's curiosity, and uses wonder to encourage respect for the way we are made. The language of the body is then taken further to explore general questions about life and relationships. The book is aimed first at adults, showing them that it is not that difficult to teach their children, while doing as much of the job for them as they want.

You will not change a culture because individual parents pick up a book. What I have in mind is that schools and parish communities take it on, and that teachers work with parents, organising workshops and complementary lessons at school for older pupils. If you combine that with the full *Alive to the World* programme you have a complete programme of respect which overflows into the community and beyond.

Last week Lord Sacks, our much respected former Chief Rabbi, wrote an article in *The Times*^{xi} on the violence which besets our world, saying that our greatest challenge isn't political, or economic or military but in the deepest sense spiritual. He suggested that none of the great faiths will win if they work alone: not Jews, not Christians, not Muslims. He said: "Thus far the 21st century has been marked by an unprecedented series of new technologies, but no new ideas."

Mother Teresa used to repeat that the greatest destroyer of peace is abortion. Might it not be that the reverse also holds true: that proper respect for the gift of sexuality brings healing and peace? We know that the Giver of the gift is capable of it. We can see that the gift is ordered towards life and love. We know that, when our sexuality is well lived, we grow in respect, trust and a spirit of adventure. We become more alive to the world around us.

We can also see in a conference such as this that the topic of family is bringing peoples of good will together. It has been a great privilege for me to take part. Thank you.

ⁱ Dr John Henry, Professor of Toxicology at Imperial College London and St Mary's Hospital, Paddington; Consultant Physician at Guy's Hospital, London. Dr Henry died prematurely in 2007.

ⁱⁱ MX Newspaper, May 14, 2013.

ⁱⁱⁱBPAS Press Release, 4 February 2014.

<http://www.bpas.org/bpasknowledge.php?year=2014&npage=0&page=81&news=624>

^{iv} Marie Stopes London office Press Release, 28 April 2014.

<http://mariestopes.org/media/research-reveals-more-half-young-women-who-have-abortions-were-using-contraception-when-they>

^v Programmes of mass inoculations of Depo-Provera have been carried out in various countries, but usually in deprived areas where a degree of compulsion is easier to manage. A UN meeting of October 2014 has been brought to an early close when African delegates protested against being targeted with these “dangerous” contraceptives, whose side-effects include doubling of breast cancer, excessive bleeding, damaged fertility, sterility and increased HIV risk. The long-acting implant Norplant was removed from the American market in 2002 because of health concerns. http://www.cfnews.org.uk/CF_News_2049.htm#22

^{vi} “Teenage Pregnancy”, Report presented to Parliament by the Prime Minister (Tony Blair), June 1999. <http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/15086/>

^{vii} Keeping silence in turn silences others. In her book *Forming Intentional Disciples* (Our Sunday Visitor (2012) p. 58), Sherry Weddell explains that the Spiral of Silence, whereby people are less likely to voice an opinion when they believe they are in the minority, has neurological foundations. The brain produces an error signal as an alert that we are out of step with others and makes us feel uncomfortable.

^{viii} “God Imagination and the Digital Mind”, Keynote address given by John McDade SJ, Principal of Heythrop College, at the Catholic Independent Schools’ Conference, Leeds, in January 2008.

^{ix} A 4-minute film introducing the programme can be found on the home page of our UK website at: www.alivetotheworld.co.uk. For sample chapters, follow the link: www.alivetotheworld.co.uk/books; for a full appreciation of the programme from Robert O’Brien, Head of RE at UK school, scroll to the bottom of the page: www.alivetotheworld.co.uk/reports (YouTube or script). For the international programme, please go to the Alliance for the Family Latin America website at: www.alafa.org/en.

^x See www.alivetotheworld.co.uk/sexuality-explained for further details.

^{xi} “The hate that starts with Jews never ends there,” by Lord Sacks, *The Times*, August 16, 2014.