

# QUO VADIS

## SACRAMENT OF MATRIMONY



**“DO NOT SAY, ‘I AM ONLY A YOUTH’;  
FOR TO ALL TO WHOM I SEND YOU YOU  
SHALL GO, AND WHATEVER I  
COMMAND YOU SHALL SPEAK.”**

Jeremiah 1:6

### The Catholic Church and Contraception

By Dave Armstrong

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#### Non-Catholic objection:

The Catholic ban on contraception is an arbitrary, unbiblical restriction  
It's just one of many areas where Catholics are out of the mainstream

#### Initial reply

The prohibition of contraception was commonly accepted by all Christians: Protestants, Catholics, and Orthodox, until 1930. It is a biblical and patristic belief.

## Extensive reply

Here is the classic biblical passage having to do with contraception:

**Genesis 38:8-10:** "Then Judah said to Onan, 'Go in to your brother's wife, and perform the duty of a brother-in-law to her, and raise up offspring for your brother.' But Onan knew that the offspring would not be his; so when he went in to his brother's wife he spilled the semen on the ground, lest he should give offspring to his brother. And what he did was displeasing in the sight of the LORD, and he slew him also."

This involved what is known as the "levirate

law": the duty to produce offspring with the wife of a dead brother. But this is not why God killed

Onan,

since the penalty for that was public humiliation and shunning, not death (Dt. 25:5-10). Context also supports this interpretation, since immediately after this (Gen. 38:11-26), is the story of Onan's father

## Pope Quote of the Month

"Marriage is...the wise institution of the Creator to realize in mankind His design of love. By means of the reciprocal personal gift of self, proper and exclusive to them, husband and wife tend towards the communion of their beings in view of mutual personal perfection, to collaborate with God in the generation and education of new lives."

Paul VI *Humanae Vitae*, 8

Judah

refusing to enforce the law and allow his *other* son, Shelah to produce a child with Tamar, his daughter-in-law. He was afraid that Shelah would be killed like Onan and his other wicked son, Er (38:7,11). Judah acknowledges his sin in 38:26: "She is more righteous than I, inasmuch as I did not give her to my son Shelah." He wasn't killed, so it is unreasonable to contend that Onan was judged and killed by God for the very same sin that Judah committed (in the same passage). Onan was judged for *contraception* (sex with the deliberate intent to unnaturally prevent procreation).

There are a host of other biblical passages which exalt fertility and the blessing of many children, and the curse of none:

1) Married couples are to "be fruitful and multiply"; this is a blessing (Gen. 1:28; 9:1,7; 28:3; 35:11; Dt. 7:13-14; Ps. 107:38; 115:14;

"Married couples are to 'be fruitful and multiply'; this is a blessing."

128:1-4; Prov. 17:6; Ecc. 6:3).

2) Barrenness is contrary to blessing and "glory" (Ex. 23:25-26; Jer. 18:21; Hos. 9:11).

3) Procreation is central to marriage (Mal. 2:14-15).

4) Childbearing is so sacred that women are even said to be "saved" by it (1 Tim. 2:15).

5) It is God Who opens and closes wombs and causes a conception to occur (Gen. 20:17-18; 29:31; 30:2,22; Josh. 24:3-4; Ruth 4:13; Ps. 113:9).

6) Children are a gift from God (Gen. 17:16,20; 29:32-33; 33:5; Ps. 127:3).

### **Objection**

But it is unreasonable in this day and age, in urban environments, to have ten or fifteen children. This is an outdated understanding of the meaning of marriage and parenthood. It may work on a farm or a desert, but not in cities and towns.

### **Reply to Objection**

The Catholic Church doesn't force married couples to have ten children! But it does require them to agree to be fruitful and always open to life as the deepest meaning and purpose of marital union (thus ruling out artificial contraception). The problem today is not the refusal to have ten children, but the (often selfish or cynical) decision to

## **Church Fathers Quote**

Lactantius (ca. 240 – ca. 320) [some] "complain of the scantiness of their means, and allege that they have not enough for bringing up more children, as though, in truth, their means were in [their] power . . . or God did not daily make the rich poor and the poor rich. Wherefore, if any one on any account of poverty shall be unable to bring up children, it is better to abstain from relations with his wife" (*Divine Institutes* 6:20)

have none at all, or very few, so that in Europe, most countries are below zero population growth, meaning that couples are averaging less than two children (while Muslims continue to have lots of children). This is an "anti-child" mentality. Children are often viewed as a mere inconvenience or a burden (even to the point of being slaughtered before they are born). The Bible, on the other hand, clearly states over and over that children (and *many* of them) are a blessing. Yet, sadly, millions of Christians today are far closer in outlook to secular (or ancient pagan) culture than the biblical worldview:

## Scripture Quote of the Month

“And God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it.” Genesis 1:28

### Martin Luther (the founder of Protestantism)

But the greatest good in married life, that which makes all suffering and labor worth while, is that God grants offspring and commands that they be brought up to worship and serve him. In all the world this is the noblest and most precious work, because to God there can be nothing dearer than the salvation of souls. Now since we are all duty bound to suffer death, if need be, that we might bring a single soul to God, you can see how rich the estate of marriage is in good works.

(*The Estate of Marriage*, 1522; *Luther's Works*, Vol. 45, 46)

### G.K. Chesterton

It has been left to the last Christians, or rather to the first Christians fully committed to blaspheming and denying Christianity, to invent a new kind of worship of Sex, which is not even a worship of Life. It has been left to the very latest Modernists to proclaim an erotic religion which at once exalts lust and forbids fertility . . . The new priests

abolish the fatherhood and keep the feast - to themselves.

(*The Well and the Shallows*, New York: Sheed & Ward, 1935, 233)

This article is taken from the book *The One-Minute Apologist* (Sophia Institute Press) by Dave Armstrong. It can be purchased through Sophia Institute Press or as an e-book package online at [www.socrates58.blogspot.com](http://www.socrates58.blogspot.com).

## Catechism Quote of the Month

"The matrimonial covenant, by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole of life, is by its nature ordered toward the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring; this covenant between baptized persons has been raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a sacrament."  
Paragraph 1601

**1**  
**Chronicles 25:5:** "All these were the sons of Heman the king's seer, according to the promise of God to exalt him; for God had given Heman fourteen sons and three daughters."

**Psalm 127:3-5:** "Lo, sons are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the sons of one's youth. Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them! . . ."

# BOOK OF THE MONTH

*Catholic for a Reason IV*

Edited by Scott Hahn & Regis Flaherty.

Marriage and family life lived according to God's plan can change lives and change the world! *Catholic for a Reason IV* explores the scriptural basis for the Catholic understanding of marriage. Join Scott and Kimberly Hahn, Mike Aquilina, and ten other well-known Catholic authors, who along with their spouses, present solid biblical testimony to the joys, struggles, and sanctity found in the sacrament of Marriage. Essays include "The World as Wedding," "Lessons Learned at Nazareth," and "Reflections on Pope Benedict XVI's First Encyclical."

*Available from The Coming Home Network at 740-450-1175 or [www.chresources.com](http://www.chresources.com)*

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For more information please contact Mary Clare Piecynski  
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