

# CCL members celebrate marriage

“This is truly CCL’s moment.”

That statement by Dr. John Bruchalski seemed to summarize the 2008 Couple to Couple League convention at the Lifeway Ridgecrest Conference Center near Asheville, N.C., July 29 to August 2. One hundred and fifty-one families with more than 350 children gathered at the every-other-year event to listen to inspirational speakers, participate in meat-and-potatoes workshops, and visit with like-minded NFP advocates from 32 states, Canada, India and Hong Kong.

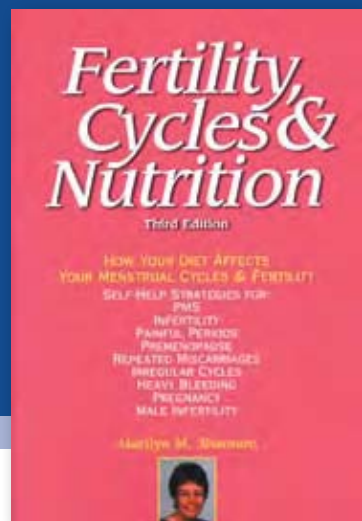
Dr. Bruchalski, founder of the Tepeyac Family Center in Fairfax, Va., said there has never been a more important time for CCL members to spread the good news of NFP.

“We are fighting evil secular forces,” he commented. “Pro-choice is not pro choice. They don’t want to give those who disagree with them a choice.” Catholics hold the joy of the truth and Bruchalski encouraged convention attendees to share that joy with all who will listen.

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# and family at convention



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Fertility, Cycles & Nutrition

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Dr. Christopher Thompson, academic dean at the Saint Paul Seminary and School of Divinity in St. Paul, Minn., noted the 40th anniversary of Humanae Vitae, which inspired the founding to the Couple to Couple League. "Humanae Vitae is the Magna Carta of the culture of life," he said. "It takes work -- a lot of unglamorous work -- to build a culture of life."

Thompson said NFP is good for marriage. He said growing up means "channeling human desires. This is not a burden, this is maturity." NFP requires a person to align the rational with the desired. "The 'plan' in natural family planning is the maturity of ordering our desires," he said.

Dr. Greg Popcak, a frequent contributor to Family Foundations magazine, encouraged couples to connect on several levels, including spiritual, psychological, emotional and social in addition to physical. He explained that frequently when couples complain of physical problems, the real problem lies in one of the other areas. Popcak explained that NFP facilitates a couple's spiritual and prayer life, helps a couple discern family size, and helps a couple achieve holiness by developing self-mastery and self-control.

Other speakers included Bishop Samuel Aquila of the Diocese of Fargo, N.D., anthropologist Katherine Dettwyler, and Damon Clarke Owens, founder of Joy-Filled Marriage and the New Jersey NFP Association. ■

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# Truth, freedom and Humanae Vitae

By Bishop Samuel J. Aquila



*Bishop Aquila presenting at the CCL convention.*

*Editor's note: Samuel J. Aquila is Bishop of Fargo, N.D. Bishop Aquila requires couples preparing for marriage in his diocese to study Theology of the Body and to take a course in Natural Family Planning. The following is an excerpted version of the remarks Bishop Aquila delivered to the convention of the Couple to Couple League on August 1 in Asheville, N.C. The entire presentation is available on at [www.CCLI.org](http://www.CCLI.org) in audio file format.*

**F**reedom is one of the noblest aspirations of human nature because the ability to be free in our human action is what makes us like God. Being made in the image and likeness of the Creator, this great gift of freedom is a sign of our human dignity and distinguishes us from the rest of the visible creation. This gift is often misunderstood and our own age has a difficult time embracing the fullest account of human freedom.

The common cultural concept of freedom is to see it as the ability to do as what one wants. "It's a free country; I can do whatever I want." How often have we heard that cliché? But it is only one of many examples of this commonly held account of our gift of freedom. This idea goes far beyond common parlance and everyday conversation. It even reaches into one of the most influential parts of our society: the opinions of the Supreme Court.

In 1992, in the *Casey* decision, Justice Kennedy wrote the following about freedom: "At the heart of liberty is the right to define one's own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe and of the mystery of human life." Since under this view we determine for ourselves what will count as right and wrong, the opinion of the court bears the mark of freedom understood as doing as one wishes. There is no concept of freedom in that statement that there is truth that undergirds freedom, or common good that undergirds freedom. It is one's right to define for himself or herself the concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and the mystery of human life. That means that every opinion is

just as good and equal as the next opinion.

When freedom is understood as the ability to do what one wants, it is totally disconnected from any idea of objective truth or a common good. Such a view must necessarily reach its goal in the overthrow of all constraint. Only when there is nothing external to the self, preventing one from doing whatever he or she wants, can this conception of freedom be attained.

But is this possible? Sooner or later, what I want is not what someone else wants, whether in small or large matters. Most of you are parents. You know the competing freedom of wills that go on with your children and the challenges that they can bring about, whether it is from Junior wanting an extra pack of gum at the check-out line, or when they go into high school and the struggles that are there, wanting no curfews, wanting a cell phone, wanting unlimited text messaging, and everything else. And then when we move to the political debates we see the competition of human will at work. This concept of freedom is something which is impossible to accomplish. Therefore, this cannot be an authentic account of freedom.

Pope Benedict the XVI reminds us that if this concept of freedom were true, the inevitable consequence would be violence and mutual destruction of freedom and life. Without an objective criterion to guide us, everyone would follow their own path. And sooner or later, a battle of wills would ensue, and we can see that throughout the world today. Therefore, freedom is not the mere description of the ability to make a choice but something much more.

Our freedom is not absolute sovereignty in the individual, or something that creates values for itself. Rather human freedom, "is the power to act freely with excellence and perfection." While freedom is a native ability, it must be formed and perfected over time. It does not merely describe the fact of a choice made but, more

importantly, describes the quality of a given choice. When a choice is made with the knowledge that this particular action will lead one to the Kingdom it is a deliberative act to choose a true good, an act that will lead to true freedom.

Many times, actions do not lead to authentic freedom. There are many enemies of freedom, both externally and internally. Internal enemies of freedom are fear, concupiscence — that is, the inclination to sin which remains from the fall — and ignorance. When overcome by these forces within one's own interior life, one does not have interior freedom.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church sums up things nicely. Freedom is the power to perform deliberative action. It is a power in which we are able to exercise and to make free choices and it must also be deliberative. As human beings endowed with intellect and will, we are able to know the truth, which will grant us true freedom.

One kind of freedom is free will. Freedom is the power rooted in reason and will to act or not to act, to do this or that, and so to perform deliberate actions on one's own responsibility. When we exercise this kind of freedom, we shape our very character. The Catechism reminds us by free will, one shapes one's own life.

If we choose well and cooperate with grace, we orient ourselves to genuine and lasting fulfillment, both here on earth and in the hereafter. Once again, the Catechism states: "Human freedom is a force for growth in truth and goodness. It attains its perfection only when directed toward God, toward the true good." And so it is important for us to understand that the proper exercise of the free will leads to freedom in an even fuller sense, the freedom of the children of God, which is found only in Jesus Christ, who is the way, the truth and the light. The noblest sort of freedom is found only in choosing the good and thereby ordering our lives to Jesus and His kingdom.

## Humanae Vitae

The gift of human sexuality is at the core of the identity of the human person. Embracing the truth of its purpose and exercise as Pope Paul VI expressed in *Humanae Vitae*, is essential to attain the experience of freedom and happiness in one's life. Human sexuality is more than a biological reality. It is a human and personal reality because a human being is not a collection of fragments but an integral whole of body and soul. This is the philosophical foundation of the Church's teaching in *Humanae Vitae*. Paul VI teaches us, "It is the whole man and the whole mission to which he is called that must be considered both its natural, earthly aspects and its supernatural, eternal aspects."

The body and soul are destined

to become expressions of each other so the spiritual and personal realms of life cannot be separated from the physical and natural. Later on, when John Paul the Great gave us his masterful Wednesday audiences on the Theology of the Body, he too would see this as foundational. For John Paul II, there is no such thing as separate biological order to the human person, which is dominated by the intellectual or technological. Man is a unity and human sexuality is a gift to the integral whole of man.

This idea stands in stark contrast to a philosophical dualism where the body and soul are thought to be completely separate from each other, like a ghost in a machine. A strict dualism fails to recognize the unity of the physical and spiritual in the human person. Instead, it sees spirit and matter as two natures united but not a unity. That is why the new age movement today receives a welcome among so many people. They see the body as being a burden. Their whole focus is on the spirit, not on the body.

This dualistic view is very prevalent in our contemporary society. It is presupposed by people who regard the body as sub-personal and who then justify acts which are at odds of the personal meaning inscribed in the body. Such acts include various forms of illicit sex, in which the body is treated as a mere instrument, as a mere object for pleasure. It also includes contraception in which the procreative meaning of bodily union is deliberately suppressed. It even includes physician-assisted suicide, which disposes of the body when it no longer functions well as an instrument.

Dualistic accounts of the relationship between body and soul are always found wanting. Instead, a holistic vision of the person is closer to the truth. The fathers of the Second Vatican Council teach us: "Man's domain of body and soul is a unity. Through his very bodily condition, he sums up in himself the elements of the material world. Through him, they are thus brought to their highest perfection and can raise their voice in praise freely given to the creator. For this reason, man may not despise his bodily life. Rather he is

*Humanae Vitae*, continued on page 30



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LA LECHE LEAGUE  
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*Humanae Vitae*, continued from page 29

obliged to regard his body as good and to hold it in honor, since God has created it and will raise it up on the last day.” Human nature, its aspirations, its activities, cannot be separated into different camps — the personal and spiritual on the one hand, and the physical and biological on the other. Human nature is a unified reality of both matter and spirit. Therefore the structure and purpose of the sexual act cannot be reduced to something merely physical or even emotional but must be appreciated, particularly through its coordination with spiritual inclinations.

The total gift of self to one’s spouse is the destiny to which husband and wife are called in the marital embrace. One wonders how one sees that total gift of self in the unbridled sex we are so often exposed to today. The deepest desire of the human heart expressed in human sexuality leads one to exit the enclosed and imprisoned “I” and begin the process of self-donation to God and to others.

The human being was never created to be alone. The human being was created for community. And one can see that even prior to the fall in the second story of creation in which Adam is given all of creation and he is given to name all of creation, there is still an emptiness, an aloneness within Adam. “None of these creatures are like me.” And then God sees what? “It is not good for man to be alone.” And that is because God is not alone. God is three persons in one God. So woman is created and what is Adam’s response? It is awe, one that is filled with joy, at last, “bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh.” And one can taste when one meditates upon that scripture the joy in Adam’s heart to receive Eve as gift. That is the community and the self-donation to which every married couple is called. It is revealed to us by God.

The basic truth of the purpose of human sexuality fulfilled in a self-giving is a precept of the natural law which one can know by practical reason. This revelation of the language of the body is what John Paul II is concerned with in his groundbreaking Wednesday catechesis “Man and Woman He Created Them,” otherwise known as the Theology of the Body. The meaning and the purpose of the body is revealed to us by Jesus Christ. Jesus teaches that in the state of original innocence, in the beginning, the body “permits man

*People attending the CCL convention express their approval for Bishop Aquila’s affirming message.*

to express himself through the sincere gift of self.” Through this teaching about concupiscence, in the present struggle, Jesus teaches us that the body is not a mere object. In His teaching about the future resurrection of the body, in which the spousal meaning of the body is ultimately fulfilled in its union with God, Christ leads us to the important truth of the language of the body.

Throughout the history of the salvation of man, revelation teaches that the spousal meaning of the body is manifest in its destiny to be the visible expression of the personal gift of self to the other, that is, to God. This is the truth that brings freedom to human sexuality.

*Humanae Vitae*, then, expresses this great truth of the spousal meaning of the body in concrete terms for morality and marriage and family life. The central teaching of *Humanae Vitae* is that the unitive and procreative meanings of the sexual act must be united. The union of these two meanings of the conjugal embrace is a necessary condition for the spousal meaning of the body to be fully expressed. Contraception separates these two meanings and in doing so, negates the ability of the body to be a visible expression of the mutual self gift which is the very purpose of sexuality. Instead of being together with the other, woman becomes an object to man, and vice versa. Those are the words of John Paul II.

*Humanae Vitae* was far sighted. It warned of grave consequences if it was rejected. Sadly, today, people all too often experience its grim prophecies as reality. These include the objectification of women, the forced sterilization of women or men by governments, the support and increase of abortion, and an increase in marital infidelity. These and far worse consequences come about.

Many object to the re-affirmation of the church’s moral tradition found in *Humanae Vitae* because they see it to be the triumph of biology over humanity, and freedom held hostage by mere physical concern. The failure of these arguments is that they overlook the unity of body and soul; they are dualistic. The personal values involved in the nature of human sexuality and the gift of freedom springing from human nature are ignored. This objection is not something new but the result of a dualism of the human person which treats anything outside the mind, especially matter, as unimportant. This idea has haunted Western thought since Descartes uttered “I think, therefore I am.” The nature of sex becomes invisible through our Cartesian glasses.

Freedom is rooted in human nature. Human nature is not extrinsic to the person and his freedom but shares a close union with the whole person. It is not a mere limit on what is possible for human action where technology is the great liberator, rather human nature is the touchstone of action that prompts and points the human person to the goals in which one finds true human fulfillment. ■