

## 2005 OMRRCA Conference The Sociological Imperative

### To Dispel the Fear of Founding a Family Rita Joseph

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I have only to close my eyes and I'm a schoolgirl back on the stage at the Toowoomba Town Hall over forty years ago. *The Sound of Music* had been a smash hit musical on Broadway and our dear old Ursuline nuns here in Australia had been given a recording of it. They so loved it that they decided that we students would do for the public a scaled down production in which we mimed all the songs which were to be played on the Sisters' old, extremely old, record player.

Well, it was a disaster. The scenery fell on Maria and the children as they sang and skipped through the hills, and just about everything went wrong. But somehow we managed to struggle through to the final scene where the Captain and Maria and the seven children were to cross the Alps into Switzerland and freedom to the strains of "*Climb every mountain, ford every stream...*" And at that very moment from the nuns' ancient record player in the darkness of the wings, there came: "*High on a hill was a lonely goatherd Yaeeyodle—yaeeyodle-ay-i-o...*"!

And an old farmer with a big loud voice at the very back of the hall called out: "Ha! The mistakes make it, don't they? Ha-ha-hah!"

I have sometimes thought that when my husband Gerard and I with our eleven children come eventually to stand before God, perhaps we shall find that that embarrassing old farmer with the Queensland drawl at the back of the Toowoomba Town Hall got it absolutely right. "The mistakes make it, don't they?" he had said; and he had touched on a profound truth.

The great Cardinal Newman grasped much the same truth, only he put it more eloquently: "*It is a rule of God's Providence that we should succeed by our failures.*"

Archbishop Fulton Sheen said once that God has written a great drama for us with instructions. And I would remind you today that none of us have bit parts in this great drama, none of us are extras. We are all called to be stars, heroes, saints. And we need both humility and courage if we are to follow the Director's instructions.

#### Afraid to found a family or to have another child?

As birth rates plummet, we need to explore and overcome the fear of having a family—it is a sociological phenomenon, what I call *familiaphobia*.

Despite the fact that it is the most wonderful and most natural thing in the world to have a baby, many couples are becoming more and more afraid to found a family, or to have another child.

I think some are frightened of making mistakes.

The Holy Father has recently put his finger unerringly on the problem. He warned against "a mentality today that on the one hand appears intimidated in the face of responsible procreation and, on the other hand, would like to dominate and manipulate life".

Bishop Anthony Fisher also noted the problem recently on the front page of the *Catholic Weekly*. Young people are frightened of commitment, he said. They are frightened to have a family. He speaks of "that leap into the dark, to have the courage and generosity to make a commitment to a person, to a great ideal or a great cause without knowing where it will take you".

Social scientists and psychologists too are homing in on this phenomenon. Professor Barry Schwartz in a recent book *The Paradox of Choice: Why More Is Less* uncovers "a crisis of commitment to a single choice". The bewildering array of choices, he says, can lead to decision-making paralysis. One study found that, when people are asked to choose a medical fund from more than 50 medical funds, they choose none. When we expect the perfect choice, he says, we are disappointed and the unintended cost is that no choice is made. Choice-overload, he says, can set unrealistically high expectations, and it can make you blame yourself for failures.

But remember Newman: "It is the rule of God's providence that we should succeed by failure."

**"All great things on earth are connected with risk..."**

We need to teach a different approach to those who seem to be averse to risk taking.

The great Dietrich Von Hildebrand said “. . . it lies in the nature of conjugal love to be bold, heroic, not to shrink back from taking a risk. All great things on earth are connected with risk. Without risk human life—in statu vitae—would be deprived of all grandeur and heritage. . . . He whose life is dominated by the intention of avoiding any possible cross, excludes everything that gives human life grandeur and depth. . . . Thus in this fleeting, earthbound life all that is great and important is connected with risk, and calls for a holy boldness. . . .”

Yet the body of academic knowledge, science and theory relating to conceiving a child and planning a family is now so formidable that it has for many couples become overwhelming, intimidating. The choices for contraception, abortion, IVF are not only immoral but also disruptive: they interfere with the way we think, with the natural confidence to have a family.

Intimidated and nervous, many turn to medical and para-medical professionals who "would like to dominate and manipulate life"?

It seems to me that many people are afraid of the immense responsibility that comes with children only because they try to do it without God. (For without God, it really is too big a decision to make on mere rational grounds.) I suspect that this is part of the attraction of IVF, that for some, it is an attempt to replace God with a "caring" team of IVF technicians, doctors, nurses who endorse and implement the couple's decision to become pregnant by hook or by crook. Surely a futile enterprise! *Unless God builds the house in vain does the builder labor.*

### **Over-medicalization—Dehumanizing the human condition**

Medical technology has overreached the proper purvey of medicine.

It has proceeded on an unsupported theory that there is no God, no transcendental future for human beings, no heaven, no hell, and no accountability.

St Augustine reminds us that "God is not found by the proud. . . not even if they could number with curious skill the stars and the sands, and measure the constellations, and plot the courses of the planets. . . ." He could have been talking of today's IVF technicians when he said "They say many true things of your creation, but he who is truth, the artificer of creation, they do not seek in piety, and therefore they do not find him. Or if they do find him, and acknowledge him to be God, they do not honor him, and 'profess themselves to be wise,' by attributing to themselves the things that are yours." That describes the IVF technicians: they attribute to themselves the things that are God's.

*The Fool says in his heart there is no God.* Those who meddle with human embryos say there are no rules except what ethical boards can frame and just as easily unframe as expediency requires. The Fool denies transcendence. He detaches human beings from their origins and destinies and insists that life on earth is all there is. No Creator's rules, just us, we decide. Thus, they take away the hope of Heaven and the threat of Hell. They take away that final accountability and in that severely limited, blinkered world, they argue "Why shouldn't people use IVF or cloning? Why shouldn't embryos be created and used to provide a better life for those who suffer?"

A philosophy that will concede no reason for all acts of sexual intercourse to remain open to conception, can find no reason why abortion or eugenics, or IVF or cloning should not be practiced. You see, if there is contempt for the spiritual element in the human intimacies that generate life, then there is contempt for life itself. If it is not the case that all human life is sacred, then no human life is sacred. If there is not an inviolable right to life for everyone, then there is an inviolable right to life for no one. In losing the universal acceptance of children, of all children, wanted, unwanted, planned or unplanned, able or disabled, we stand to lose an integral part of our humanity. We soon find ourselves at odds with that first principle of natural law: life is good, and to be supported and favored, and all that threatens it is to be avoided.

Misuse of medicine now distorts

the natural act of procreation;

the natural process of pregnancy;

the natural process of being born;

the natural processes of menarche and menopause;

the natural process of dying.

I'm not talking here of setting right things that are wrong; nor of easing pain. Rather I'm referring to the deliberate medical, chemical or surgical reconfiguration of natural functions. Over-medicalization of ordinary life events has seen the replacement of the intensely intimate, profoundly human procreative act with a clumsy conglomerate of invasive surgery to retrieve eggs, acts of masturbation in a cubicle, and clever manipulation of eggs and sperm in petrie dishes; freezing of embryos etc. etc.

The 20th century saw the expansion of medicine right across the globe. Pharmaceutical companies assumed multi-national clout, medical research teams are truly international, able to move from strict jurisdictions to lax ones. Evasion of bioethical guidelines, like tax avoidance, has become a very sophisticated game. At international level—a global network of UN agencies and like-minded international non-government organizations (NGOs) has worked the international conference circuit trying to impose a culture of conformity across all nations, insisting on accessible, affordable abortion and contraception for all women and girls. As an exercise in manipulation of government health programs, and the funneling of health dollars to the pharmaceutical industry, practical results have been stunning—but overall improvement in health is much more dubious. The illusion of choice, a bewildering array of fake choices like contraceptives and abortifacients, is peddled by the World Health Organization where pregnancy is still lumped in with diseases to be averted, vaccinated against.

### **All new life is good**

And it is into this madness, that for the sake of the family we give to the world the sweet sanity, the serenity of the Billings Ovulation Method,

with its generous, loving, natural way of life, and its beautiful confident philosophy that all new life is good. This is our job: to dispel some of that fear, to overcome some of that intimidation, to remind the world that procreation is a miracle: each new life is more a miracle than a product, each new baby more an ardent need than an academic choice, each new family more a bold act of faith than a strictly rational plan.

When we approach procreation it should be with humility, with a sort of “holy awe”.

St Augustine said “God is the kind of artist who’s greatness in his masterpieces is not lessened in his minor works...” Even the tiniest, newest human embryo is a masterpiece. The more you teach me the science of having a baby, the more I am convinced it is a miracle.

G. K. Chesterton understood this: “Religion has for centuries been trying to make men exult in the wonders of creation, but it is forgotten that a thing cannot be completely wonderful as long as it is sensible...”

Perhaps sometimes we human beings can be too sensible, too scientific, too smart for our own good. Sometimes it might good for us not to be too sensible—lest we lose the wonder. Perhaps, sometimes, there is too much planning, not enough love, not enough commitment to found and grow a family.

Always we should be conscious of what Keats calls “the holiness of the heart’s affections.” For to love and be loved, he says, “that is the heart of life.”

I would speak here to our splendid Billings doctors, professors and researchers and urge them not to try too hard for a 100% perfect method (currently some 97%-98% effective). It seems to me that we need, that we shall always need, that little window of uncertainty.

We know God doesn’t need it He can override all natural and unnatural impediments to having a baby. *“Your Father can raise up sons of Abraham from these very stones...”*

The same God who set up the laws of the universe, who could calm the wind and the sea, the same God who sent His Son to be born of a virgin who knew not man, that same God who gave children to post-menopausal women like Sarah and Elizabeth, this same all powerful God has no need of a window of opportunity in His creation.

But we frail and forgetful human beings, we need it—we need it as a reminder of our subservient role as co-creators with God—a reminder to be humble in our cooperation with God’s will. We are not to boast about our children as our “choices”—in our choosing, we must always line up our will with God’s will.

### **A Holy Confidence**

To do God’s will in our small everyday world—this is a quiet heroism. Love empowers. As each new baby or new twins came along I found I could do everyday “six impossible things before breakfast”! This is because love grows us. St Paul says *“We must put away the things of childhood.... When I was a child I thought as a child...”*

When we become parents, we become fully adult. There is a rightness. We shouldn’t delay having children for trivial reasons...

There is no need for fear.

St Augustine says: “O Lord our God, under the shadow of your wings... You will carry us, as little ones you will carry us, and even up to our grey hairs will you carry us. For since you are our strength, then it is strength indeed...”.

He takes our weakness, our fears, and makes us strong.

The little St Teresa says that everything is a grace and that we are to rest in God’s arms *“conscious of our weakness and boldly confident in his goodness.”*

Jesus Himself said *“Does not your father in heaven know you need these things? ... not a sparrow falls to the ground...every hair on your head is counted...”*

*“I would have gathered you under my wings like a mother hen gathers her chicks but you wouldst not...”*

So why this fear, this *familiaphobia*?

As St Theresa of Avila says: “The devil seems to be frightening us with scarecrows!” Think, for example, of the cost/benefit analysis of having children, the financial spreadsheets, the terrifying newspaper articles on how much it costs to raise a child—all scarecrows! My husband has always laughed at those newspaper cost estimates—he says we must have been millionaires all these years and didn’t know it!

### **Beware “the lies of your community”**

Nevertheless, in planning a family, we must be careful to avoid the human arrogance and conceit that denies God’s providence. We must remember that human choice operates in the context of what one philosopher has called “the lies of your own community.”

What are the lies of our community? You will find them in the vulgar fiction and magazines of our day that promote “recreational sex”, in Hollywood hilarity about holy things, in the cosmic folly of believing that children are not a gift from God but can be demanded as “a right” and can be acquired via paid services of the legal and medical professions.

Then there is the lie about abortion and contraception being “reproductive rights” of women. All based on another infamous lie that women

cannot control their fertility without these “aids”.

But we know our worth—not for us the mindless copulation of animals. Women, no less than men, are creatures of intellect and free will. When we choose to control our sexuality, fertility presents no problem. All men and women have the ability and the responsibility to exercise sexual control. Our rape laws attest to this.

Another lie is the idea of “psychological infertility”, now promoted by lesbian lobby groups: the inability of women to conceive a child where the infertility arises from a woman’s aversion to the natural procreative act in heterosexual intercourse. On this condition is premised “the reproductive health right” of lesbian women to access IVF services.

### **True Context for fertility: reciprocal love proper to procreation**

How far are these poor women from Pope John Paul 11’s insight that the true context for fertility is a reciprocal love proper to procreation. “It is clear”, he says, “that when one speaks of ‘natural’ regulation, we are not referring only to respecting biological rhythms. It is a question of responding to the truth about the human person in their intimate unity of spirit, psyche and body, a unity that can never be merely reduced to an overall question of biological mechanisms. Only in the context of the spouses’ reciprocal love, total and without reserve, can the moment of generating life, to which the future of mankind is tied, be lived in all its dignity.”

### **A child is not a choice but a need.**

To have children in this true context confers dignity and distinction on married lives of quiet fidelity and love. We need faith as well as reason.

It’s nonsense to pretend that we can design a truly rational justification for making the positive choice to have children: it would require a phenomenal foresight and a logical ability sophisticated beyond mere human capacity. The lifelong consequences are formidable enough, but the eternal consequences are immeasurable. And so though it is relatively easy for well-educated men and women to articulate and weigh up reasons for choosing a career, a political party, a dog, a house or what to have for breakfast, choosing to have children is different. Somehow we have to find the honesty and the humility to admit that it is really a choice beyond our ken, this choice to bring to life another human being.

Our hearts have been overlaid with a sophistication that has disguised the essential and enduring truth that procreation isn’t a choice—it is a need, perhaps the oldest, deepest, most fundamental need of humankind, a profoundly compelling need to share the miracle of life.

### **God’s secret providence**

We have a need too to acknowledge the Creator, to recognize that each child is pure gift. In the ordinary world of good manners, it used to be in bad taste, a social solecism to insist on choosing another’s gift to us. Do we really think God doesn’t know the best gift to give us both right now and in the long run? God’s gifts are never arbitrary and certainly never mistimed.

St Augustine understood about God’s “secret providence”. *“In my pride, I wandered off and ‘was carried about with every wind’, but still most secretly was I ruled by you.”* He tells us of his mother St Monica, of her grief as he left her behind on the North African shore to go to Rome.

*“But in your deepest counsels you heard the crux of her desire: you had no care for what she then sought, so that you might do for me what she forever sought. The Wind blew and filled our sails and the shore receded from sight. On that shore in the morning she stood, wild with grief, and with complaints and groans she filled your ears...She did not know how great a joy you would fashion for her out of my absence.”*

From Rome God led him to St. Ambrose in Milan. *“All-unknowing I was led to him by you...”* St Augustine did not plan any of this and yet it worked out right—the rightness of God’s planning.

We can try too hard to get it perfect. Human planning is almost a misnomer—it’s always partial, contingent on God’s plans. To plan is to see ahead. God’s planning is always superior, he sees further!

### **Why the fear of having a baby?**

There are no surprise pregnancies for God. St Augustine again: *“...Not one of them could possibly seem new and unexpected to Him, nor would He foresee them merely, as it were at the last moment, but by His foreknowledge He would have them before Him throughout all eternity.”*

God sees the whole of our history from the first man to the last and St Paul says “All things work to the good for those who love God...” So why the fear of babies?

No family needs to fear being too small or too large. Each is a part of the larger family of the Church: we belong to the Communion of Saints (the ones who have gone before us are cheering us on, praying us on); and we are no orphans: “...I will not leave you orphans”, Jesus promised. We belong to the mystical body of Christ who is our head and we His members. Christ is our brother, and we have our Father in heaven, we have our mother Mary, we have Holy Mother Church, and we have our own special Guardian Angels, and the Holy Spirit as Guide and Comforter: we’re not alone. We are here by design not chance—we are loved.

St John said “Love begets love”. Family is begotten in love. This is the awesome nuptial mystery of union—father, mother, child—corresponding to those other great mysteries of the union of Christ and his church and the union of three Divine Persons in one Holy Trinity.

So as we try to live this mystery, of what are we afraid? The world’s ridicule? We should never be embarrassed or ashamed of doing God’s will.

Divine truth is the only worthwhile reality. St Teresa of Avila wrote often of her understanding that many of the good things she did appeared “ridiculous” before the eyes of the world. And she was a doctor of the church. God’s wisdom seems foolish to a foolish world. And the world’s wisdom is folly to God. God’s ways are *“as far above us as the Heavens are above the Earth...”*

In the great battle here on earth between good and evil, fear is awfully debilitating, even fear of ridicule. We're all just little ones, all of us caught in a bewildering array of choice amidst uncertainty of outcome. The Lord says, "Set out into the deep," but most of us, distracted by the din of the world's wisdom being shouted at us from the shore, huddle cautiously near the shoreline—we miss the great catch.

### **No baby is ever a mistake**

No baby is ever a mistake. From Cain and Abel, the first babies, to the very last baby to be born on earth, no baby is ever a mistake.....

Having sexual intercourse before or outside marriage is always a mistake, or a grave sin where there is full knowledge and willfulness. Submitting one's most intimate human function to manipulative, abusive and mercenary IVF programs is always a mistake, and a grave sin where it is undertaken knowingly and willingly. But the children which issue from these mistakes are never themselves mistakes.

No child ever comes into the world without God's "Yes".

God says, "*Let it be done,*" and it was done and "*He saw that it was good*". At the conception of each child, He infuses His love into a new soul and that eternal soul is His direct creation. And nine months later, we can respond with the heart's joyous leap of recognition and welcome, and once again echo Adam's cry of deep satisfaction: "*Ah, this one is bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh.*"

It's the most natural thing in the world to have a baby, but it is also the most intimate, holy, divine/human thing to have a child. Each child is a three-fold triumph of creation—it takes a man and a woman and God. And "*if God is with us, who shall be afraid?*"

Saint Theresa of Avila gets it right:

*"There is no need to seek reasons for what Thou willest, for thou dost transcend all natural reason and make all things possible, thus showing clearly that we have only to love thee truly...and thou my lord will make everything easy".* We have only to love thee truly and thou my Lord will make everything easy...

### **So how do we decide "How many children?"**

The Church's *Catechism* gives us two pieces of instruction: that we must be generous, and that we must take into account our eternal destiny as well as our present situation.

We decide "*in conformity with the generosity appropriate to responsible parenthood*". And

*"Let all be convinced that human life and the duty of transmitting it are not limited by the horizons of this life only: their true evaluation and full significance can be understood only in reference to man's eternal destiny."*

The new *Compendium of Social Doctrine of the Church* speaks of the need for prudence: studying and reflecting on the question in hand; evaluating the reality in the light of God's plan; and deciding upon the action to be taken. Prudence, the text continues, is neither human shrewdness nor timidity in making a decision, but a virtue that helps to decide with wisdom and courage the course of action to be taken.

Some other helpful advice may be found in Father Eugene Boylan's classic *This Tremendous Lover* where he says that sometimes it is the will of God that we don't know the will of God. But, he says, all we need to do is to reflect prayerfully and then take a reasonable decision. We are to leave the rest to God.

What we have to remember is that the whole sweep of human history is laid out before God, before it has ever happened. "*Before you were formed in the womb, I knew you.*"

Our whole history is already known to him. History is what happens when God's original plan for us interacts with the free will that he has granted us, where he permits us to decide for ourselves to follow His plan or to despise and despoil it. He never wills us to sin but He permits us to do so. What He wants for us is that we love Him. We, who are made in his image and likeness, would never want anyone to be forced to love us. Love has to be freely given to be genuine love. So here we are, His creatures, on whom He has bestowed free will and a capacity to love as on none of His other creatures. We mess up God's plan for us, but God has allowed for this—He sent His own Son... "*I come to make all things new.*" That's the clear pattern promised in the Old Testament: Adam and Eve sin, yet God was able to bring good even out of evil.

*"O happy fault that won for us so great a saviour!"*

When we seek forgiveness, such is His mercy that He covers our mistakes. He re-weaves our lives and re-routes a paths so that all works to the good. Within the limitations which, by our willfulness and pride, we ourselves put on God's mercy and love, God works for each of us the best possible of all outcomes that He could foresee and foreknow.

### **"...that you may love them of free grace"**

Life's about love—"to love and be loved and to make God loved", says the little St Theresa. And so to have a family is to have life more abundantly. It gives you a special chance to serve God in a unique and heroic way. Our Lord said "*If you love only those who love you,*" and to St. Catherine of Siena: "*... I have placed you in the midst of your fellows that you may do to them that which you cannot do to me, that is to say, that you may love them of free grace, without expecting any return...*" Each new child is a new chance to love "of free grace" with this perfect kind of love that pleases God immensely. And through those first months and years of sleepless nights and tired, troubled days, even while we are loving that new baby "of free grace, without expecting any return", we shall find that God Himself is responding with extravagant gifts, with every grace we need.

Let me say that I think that "method" is too small a word for what you Billings teachers are teaching—it is a "way", a way of life, and if taught rightly it becomes a truly significant way. It is the truth, the truth, not only about our bodies, but about the capacity of our souls to love and be

loved; And it is about life, the transmission of life... The Way, the Truth, the Life. It is *for* Christ and *of* Christ that you are teaching. In teaching the Billings Method, we must teach both scientific truth and transcendental truth. Some of course will reject the latter, yet we must teach both truths, the complete truth. As von Balthazar has said: "*Truth is symphonic*".

The Billings Method is the Creator's gift to us. We must learn to scrutinize honestly reasons for using the method to avoid having children, and we must learn to accept the great cross when using the method to try to become pregnant does not result in the gift of a child. As IVF success rates climb, we have to remind the world that it is still very wrong. Into the first frail single-cell, God infuses the life-giving principle of the soul, unique and eternal. "*He lets his rain fall on the just and the unjust.*" He permits procreation through the abuse of our free will. IVF in this respect is the same abuse of reproductive faculties as having a child through adultery or fornication.

Remember Christ's description of how the world will know his followers? "*See how they love one another*". In this age of sexual perversions, this age of routine chemical sabotage or surgical mutilation of healthy reproductive systems, that 2000-year-old direction takes on a new and vital meaning. See how we Christians love one another—with wholeness, with completeness, with integrity—no contraception, no abortion, no artificial limitations—but with real fidelity and tenderness, and the one true intimacy possible only between one man and one woman, committed to each other in marriage till death do us part.

Yet a war is being waged against the natural order and against the natural pattern of family formation.

No wonder Pope John Paul says: "*We are the men and women of an extraordinary time, exhilarating yet full of contradictions. Humanity now has instruments of unprecedented power. We have devised*", the Holy Father says, "*the capacity to intervene in the very well-springs of life. Man can use this power for good within the bounds of the moral law, or he can succumb to the shortsighted pride of a science which accepts no limits, but tramples on the respect due to every human being.*"

And yet the Holy Father is full of hope. In his latest book, *Memory and Identity*, he reminds us that evil is limited, that we shall and do "emerge from [evil] ideologies to understand them", and that redemption overcomes all evil. The Holy Father believes that even now we are entering a new springtime of the Church.

Of springtime, an old rather obscure Victorian poet, Swinburne, once wrote:

*And time remembered is grief forgotten*

*And frosts are slain and flowers begotten*

*And in green underwood and cover*

*Blossom by blossom the Spring begins.*

And that's how even now our teaching is changing the world Teaching a generous, tender, faithful way of loving—slowly, quietly, our victory will come, as one by one, one young man and one young woman, one marriage at a time, home by home, family by family, right across this land and fair across the world...in the Dominican Republic, in Fiji, in the Sudan and Tanzania, in Ireland and Malaysia, in Pakistan and Singapore, in South Africa, in the United Kingdom and in the United States of America...in green underwood and cover, blossom by blossom the Spring begins.