Our Lady of Fatima and the Errors of Russia

As most Catholics know, between May 13 and October 13, 1917, Mary appeared to three peasant children in Fatima, Portugal, and delivered a three-part message—the “three secrets” of Fatima, as they’ve come to be known. The first secret presented a horrifying vision of hell. The second involved a prophecy of World War II and the warning that “Russia would spread her errors throughout the world.” However, Mary assured the children, “in the end” her Immaculate Heart would triumph and an “era of peace” would be granted to the world.

Mary also told the children that “the Holy Father will have much to suffer.” This brings us to the third secret of Fatima, which was not publicly revealed until the year 2000, and which we will revisit later.

The errors of Russia mentioned in the second secret, rightly cause us to think of the spread of communism, the atheistic ideology based on Marxist economic theory.
As most of us learned in school, Karl Marx considered class struggle to be the defining factor of history. But digging deeper, Marx also believed that the fundamental “class struggle” was found in monogamous marriage and, indeed, in the sexual difference itself. “The first division of labor,” Marx cowrote with Frederick Engels, “is that between man and woman for the propagation of children.” In turn, Engels affirmed that Marxist theory “demands the abolition of the monogamous family as the economic unit of society.”

It seems the deeper revolution—and the deeper “error of Russia”—is the one aimed at destroying marriage and the family. In fact, much later in her life, Sister Lucia (the only of the three visionaries of Fatima to live beyond childhood; she died in 2005) wrote, “A time will come when the decisive battle between the kingdom of Christ and Satan will be over marriage and the family.” The modern agenda to deconstruct gender, marriage, and family life often draws straight from Marx. As feminist author Shulamith Firestone wrote in her 1970 manifesto *The Dialectic of Sex*: “And just as the end goal of socialist revolution was . . . the elimination of the . . . economic class distinction itself, so the end goal of feminist revolution must be . . . the elimination of . . . the sex distinction itself [so that] genital differences between human beings would no longer matter culturally.”
this way, she asserted, “the tyranny of the biological family would be broken.”

But what kind of revolution would be needed to render the sex distinction meaningless? To answer that question, we first need to understand the natural meaning and purpose of the sex distinction, more specifically, the meaning of genital difference.

**The Facts of Life?**

Imagine, if you will, that an alien being from a genderless galaxy landed on earth to study the human being. Coming from such a world, the male-female difference would likely be the first thing to catch its attention. “What is this difference for?” it would ask. Upon study, this alien would readily observe that each member of the human species is amazingly self-sufficient in his or her functions as an organism. The heart, the lungs, the kidney, the pancreas, the stomach, the bladder, the rectum, etc., all work together to carry out their functions. And both male and female have all the same organs . . . except . . . except what we fittingly call the genital organs.

There is one function this alien has discovered—and a critical function indeed—that simply cannot be carried out without cooperation from another member of the species. And that other member of the species must be of the opposite gender (that is, must
have different, complementary genital organs), or said function doesn’t function. This is the light that illuminates for the alien the most basic purpose of the gender difference. The genital organs of male and female actually work together in a stunning, harmonious interdependency to generate new members of the species. It’s where we get the word gender, which, based on its Greek root, means “the manner in which one generates.” We see the same root in words like genesis, generous, genitals, progeny, genes, and genealogy.

Furthermore, since the child born to them cannot survive on its own, the alien rightly realizes that the man and the woman who cooperated in generating this new life, if they are to be responsible, must commit themselves to rearing their child. Precisely this commitment—the commitment to responsible genital intercourse as the foundation of future generations—is called marriage.

It used to be obvious to everyone: genitals are meant to generate. We called it “the facts of life.” But today those facts are entirely up for grabs, and the fundamental link between gender, genitals, and generating has all but vanished from the way we understand ourselves and our genital relationships. As a culture, we are desperately in need of recovering what should be an obvious and celebrated truth: sex leads to babies. Tragically, as I will demonstrate, when we fail to re-
The Crack in the Dam

How did we as a culture come to forget—or, rather, dismiss—the fact that genitals are meant to generate? Since the beginning of history men and women have sought ways—usually crude and ineffective ways—of thwarting the generative power of their genitals. However, only with the vulcanization of rubber in the mid-1800s, and then with the invention of the Pill a century later, did we have consistently reliable ways of doing so.

Still, if a true contraceptive revolution was to occur, it needed not only new technologies, but new mentalities. As difficult as it may be for us to imagine today, contraception in much of the Western world was not only frowned upon at the turn of the twentieth century as immoral; it was also illegal. Those who campaigned for its acceptance knew they would make little progress without the “blessing” of Christian leaders. Few today realize that, until 1930, all Christian denominations were unanimous in their firm opposition to any attempt to separate genitals from generating. That year, the Anglican Church succumbed to pressure and opened the door to contraception at its Lambeth Conference. In doing so, it became the first Christian
body to break with the continuous teaching of the early Church, the saints throughout the ages, and all the Reformers from Luther to Calvin and beyond.

Within a matter of weeks, Pope Pius XI responded as follows:

Since, therefore, openly departing from the uninterrupted Christian tradition some recently have judged it possible solemnly to declare another doctrine regarding this question, the Catholic Church . . . raises her voice in token of her divine ambassadorship and . . . proclaims anew: any use whatsoever of matrimony exercised in such a way that the act is deliberately frustrated in its natural power to generate life is an offence against the law of God and of nature.4

In the years that followed, every major Protestant denomination shifted from condemning contraception to not only accepting it, but advocating it. Unimaginable global pressure was now being put on the Catholic Church to follow suit, and it seemed to many that it was having its desired effect. In the early 1960s, the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council stated that they reserved judgment on certain “questions which need further and more careful investigation.” These “have been handed over . . . to a commission for the study of population, family, and births, in order that,
after it fulfills its function, the Supreme Pontiff may pass judgment.”5

The point in question was the birth control pill, a new technology at the time that seemed to some not to qualify under the traditional teaching against contraception. The council’s tacit admission of uncertainty on this point gave people the impression that a papal blessing on the Pill was forthcoming. In fact, the majority of the papal commission studying the question advised Pope Paul VI not only to accept the Pill, but to follow the lead of other Christian communities and change Church teaching on contraception all together.

When the Majority Report was leaked to the press in early May 1967, there was a sense of certainty that a change in teaching was immanent. One week later, Paul VI visited Fatima. He came on Our Lady of Fatima’s feast day (May 13) and prayed specifically against “new ideologies” that were threatening the Church by introducing a “profane mentality” and “worldly morals.”6

A little over a year later, on July 25, 1968, Paul VI shocked the world when he issued his encyclical letter Of Human Life (Humanae Vitae), reaffirming the traditional Christian teaching against contraception, including the Pill. Although he was mocked and scorned globally—both from outside and, sadly, from within the Church—his words were prescient. He warned that a contracepting world becomes a
world of rampant infidelity; a world where women and childbearing are degraded; a world in which governments trample on the rights and needs of the family; and a world in which human beings believe they can manipulate their bodies at will. In other words, Paul VI showed himself to be an “astronomer” who understood the power of contraception to eclipse the meaning of the body, casting a dark shadow over the meaning of the gender difference itself, and hence, the meaning of marriage and the family.

Wise men and women throughout history have always understood that fertility was the light that illuminated the sexual relationship, and that rendering it sterile would cast a long shadow over civilization. In fact, when Margaret Sanger first started her global campaigns for contraception in the early 1900s, there was no shortage of predictions that embracing contraception would lead to the societal chaos in which we’re now immersed. You might be just as surprised as I was to read what the following prominent thinkers of the early twentieth century had to say about contraception and what they predicted would happen if we embraced it.

Sigmund Freud, for example, while he was clearly no friend of religion, understood that the “abandonment of the reproductive function is the common feature of all perversions. We actually describe a sexual activity as perverse,” he said, “if it has given up the aim
of reproduction and pursues the attainment of pleasure as an aim independent of it.”

Theodore Roosevelt condemned contraception as a serious threat against the welfare of the nation, describing it as “the one sin for which the penalty is national death, race death; a sin for which there is no atonement.”

Gandhi insisted that contraceptive methods are “like putting a premium on vice. They make man and woman reckless.” He predicted that nature “will have full revenge for any such violation of her laws. Moral results can only be produced by moral restraints.” Hence, if contraceptive methods “become the order of the day, nothing but moral degradation can be the result. . . . As it is, man has sufficiently degraded woman for his lust, and [contraception], no matter how well meaning the advocates may be, will still further degrade her.”

When a committee of the Federal Council of Churches in America issued a report suggesting it follow the Anglican acceptance of contraception, The Washington Post published a stinging editorial with the following prophetic statement: “Carried to its logical conclusions, the committee’s report if carried into effect would sound the death knell of marriage as a holy institution by establishing degrading practices which would encourage indiscriminate immorality. The suggestion that the use of legalized contraceptives would be ‘careful and restrained’ is preposterous.”