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Breastfeeding and Catholic Motherhood: God's Plan for You and Your Baby

Sheila M Kippley

Sophia Institute Press, 2005

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Sheila Kippley offers her readers a view of breastfeeding from the perspective of a forty-year veteran of breastfeeding promotion, an authority on natural family planning, and a devoted Catholic. Her warm style uses personal history, narratives, research in human sciences, and professional policy statements to encourage readers to choose the infant feeding plan of the “Author of Nature” (p. 14) (clearly a theological statement). Her unique contribution is the reference to teachings of the Roman Catholic Church, including Vatican II documents, papal statements, dissertations, and sermons. She takes the “theology of the body” (p. xii) into the realm of the mother-baby relationship. Although this is not a “how to” book, its gentle, basic, practical advice about “ecological breastfeeding” (p. 60) as part of natural family planning gives it the quality of a handbook as well as an admonition. A final chapter includes thoughts on spiritual practices and breastfeeding, suggesting the contemplative aspect of the breastfeeding experience. Helpful endnotes are found in the appendix.

The title leaves no ambiguity about the intended audience. When recommending the book, even to Catholic mothers, a judicious, discerning approach is in order considering the counter-culture nature of our message about infant feeding and parenting. Of course, the subject of breastfeeding transcends any particular religion. Lactation consultants of any faith or of none will find this a helpful volume if no offense is taken by the recognition of the author’s particular faith. Further development of these ideas might include the concept of the breastfeeding Madonna as a feminist icon, recognition of the need for economic and psycho-social support for breastfeeding and stay-at-home mothers, comment about cosleeping controversies and the dilemma of maternal-infant transmission of HIV in light of health care ethics.

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