

ARTIFICIAL BIRTH CONTROL

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A nominal Catholic (one not well informed in the teachings of the Church) approaches me and argues that due to population growth, birth control should be allowed within marriage.

First, let me start by thanking you for approaching me on such an important matter. And, since this is such an extensive topic, I also would like to begin by inviting you to have a conversation (dialogue) with me on it, would that be ok with you?

Yes, that would be fine.

Great !

This whole issue of birth control has been around for a long time, it is not something new, however, it was triggered by the sexual revolution of the 1960's. The whole "population growth" panic which also began during that time has been proven to be demonstrably untrue. Extensive research has shown that every country that has adopted the contraceptive mentality has actually had negative demographics.

Would you agree with me that the world's population has changed throughout history ?

Yes, I do agree with you, that is why I believe birth control should be allowed within marriage, to avoid over population.

Well, I did some research and here is what I found out.....

Population in the world is currently growing at a rate of around 1.10% per year. The annual growth rate is currently declining and is projected to continue to decline in the coming years, but the pace of the future change is uncertain. Currently, it is estimated that it will become less than 1% by 2020 and less than 0.5% by 2050. This means that world population will continue to grow in the 21st century, but at a slower rate compared to the recent past. In the 1950's and 60's, it was at 2% and above.¹

What does this tell us? First of all, that this whole issue of "population growth" is not a valid argument, since 1% per year is really not a significant number, at least not one to worry about. One of your concerns is that we are going to have too many people and not enough food to give them, so the poor become poorer, and the rich become richer, right?

Exactly, that is one of my concerns.

Well, this population control mindset that we are living in (because you are not the only one who feels this way) inevitably implies that the problem of poverty is not creating conditions which allow the poor to rise out of poverty, but simply guarantees that there are going to be mless poor people in the world.

That being said, when it comes to over population, there is nothing to be concerned about, if we do things right, let me explain to you what I mean. The institution of marriage legitimizes the sexual relationship between a man and a woman. In other words, this is the proper place where the conjugal act should take place. And, it is usually within this context, that procreation happens, which is the beginning of a person's existence.

Are you following me?

Yes, I am listening to you.



What has been happening is that couples have been engaging in pre-marital sex for a very long time, and not just in the U.S, but all over the world. This in turn, has exceeded the number of unwanted pregnancies (which sadly have usually ended up in abortions).

"Janet Smith shares with us that priests have told her that 85% or more of those coming to them for marriage preparation are already having sex and about 50% are cohabiting. Both activities are very bad preparation for marriage".²

These numbers above are alarming, 85% of those preparing for marriage are already having sexual intercourse. Sexual relationships outside of marriage automatically places the person as an object for pleasure. And, this does not mean (it is just the man or just the woman), it could be either or. In other words, the man could also be the object to be enjoyed.

"A 'marital' sexual relationship outside the framework of marriage is always objectively a wrong done to the woman. Always - even when the woman consents to it, and indeed even when she herself actively desires and seeks it."³

Are you with me?

Yes, I am with you, it is very interesting what you are telling me. Please go on.

The majority of these couples are using some type of artificial birth control methods. Another way of saying this, is they are interfering with God's perfect plan of procreating (whether they know it or not). This act was meant to happen within the context of marriage during the conjugal act between a husband and a wife. Therefore, any interactive performance of love which hinders the capacity to give life blocks God's plan, it reverses it, (and this can be applied to married couples too).

Human life is sacred, would you agree with me on this?

Yes, but I am not denying the sacredness of life, what I am saying is that birth control should be allowed in marriage.

Since you believe in the sacredness of life like I do, I am going to explain to you how birth control couldn't possibly be a part of your marriage (or any marriage for that matter), and the reasons why.

During my lifetime I have performed extensive research on this topic, precisely because it is such a controversial issue. Therefore, I am going to be using some quotes found in Humanae Vitae (this is a Church document which was especially written about birth control), which some I know from memory. It never ceases to amaze me how much retention a human brain can hold. Furthermore, I consider that it is my responsibility to speak to you clearly and truthfully about this issue.

I have to admit, you have peaked my interest, I never thought that my simple question was going to be taking so much of your time. Please go on....

"Marriage and conjugal love are by their nature ordained toward the procreation and education of children. Children are really the supreme gift of marriage and contribute in the highest degree to their parent's welfare."⁴

When it comes to husband and wife, the Church teaches us that they are not free to act as they choose when it comes to transmitting life, as if it was up to them to decide when to give life or not. It is God who decides when to give life and when to take it away.

What has happened is that some people conclude that by using unlawful birth control methods, their families will be happier, because (due to their family income) they presuppose that they don't have to have a child if they don't want one or cannot afford one. This only displays a very selfish attitude on their part. Research has shown quite the opposite, families who use unlawful birth control methods usually end up in divorce because of marital infidelity (which is one of the repercussion of adopting these methods).

Clearly these people have been practicing various methods of contraception in order to avoid pregnancy (due

to many reasons, such as emotional, psychological, financial, etc). But, all this has caused more harm than what they could possibly ever imagine. Because any blockage of the fecund performance is forbidden, such as direct abortion, (which many people have engaged in) by utilizing the birth control pill (which was introduced back in 1960).

The Church has always condemned (and I have to use this strong word) the use of means which directly prevent conception, such as the pill and many others. Those are practices which are opposed to the natural law of God. Unfortunately, we live in a society, where anyone (even teenagers) have access to contraceptives, as easy as getting a hamburger at a fast-food place (which only promotes this kind of lifestyle) and usually ends up harming their relationships in the long run.

And, you may be wondering, well, if they are not married, I can understand them using artificial birth control methods, but if they are married, why can't they?

Yes, that's right, that did cross my mind, just now.

Well, what happens is that when couples (married or not married), in this case we will speak about married couples, engage in the usage of these contraceptive methods, they lose respect for the woman and, they no longer care for her physical and psychological stability. The man begins to consider her as a mere instrument for his selfish enjoyment. The person is degraded to the status of an object of use.

"Every action which, whether in anticipation of the conjugal act, or in its accomplishment, or in the development of its natural consequences, proposes, whether as an end or as a means, to render procreation impossible is intrinsically evil"⁵

Furthermore, the Catechism of the Catholic Church (this is a book which contains all the teachings of the Church) teaches us that:

"Legitimate intentions on the part of the spouses do not justify recourse to morally unacceptable means . for example, direct sterilization or contraception".⁶

Since procreation is the principal end of marriage, any method which prevents it is morally wrong, just as adultery and abortion are morally wrong. The reason being is that couples cooperate with God in transmitting life.

Everything you are telling me is really captivating, I have never really thought about the consequences of using artificial birth control in my marriage, how would it affect it?

Well, for starters, it promotes marital infidelity and it reduces our moral standards. We need to raise our moral standards (not lower them). We need to safeguard our moral values. Another consequence is a man becomes accustomed to the use of contraceptive methods and he may initiate disrespecting the woman (in this case his wife) and he begins treating her as an object (instrument) for his own pleasure.

Granted, not everyone will accept this truth or agree with it, but the Church is wise and sincere, therefore, it expresses her concern for all her children. Before God, there is a moral obligation to do so.

Now, let's talk a little about responsible parenthood, would that be ok with you ?

Yes, I guess it doesn't hurt, please continue

"With regard to physical, economic, psychological and social conditions, responsible parenthood is exercised by those who prudently and generously decide to have more children, and by those who, for serious reasons and with due respect to moral precepts, decide not to have additional children for either a certain or an indefinite period of time."⁷

"Marital intercourse is, and must be, a manifestation of love. Sexual relations between a man and a woman in marriage have their full value as a union of persons only when they go with conscious acceptance of the possibility of parenthood "⁸

In other words, any couple who engages in sexual activity must be aware of the possibility that they could become parents. This might be intimidating for some people (who are not ready to be having any type of sexual intimacy). But as parents they have an even greater responsibility in front of God, of making sure they are raising those children to follow God's way. They are collaborators in creating a new human life with Him. However, if couples are not willing to become parents, they should avoid having sexual intercourse. Due to the fact that sexual intercourse is the union of persons between a husband and a wife, and it is the biological cause of conception. Therefore, if it excludes the possibility of procreation, it is not love, but lust.

"It is a serious error to think that a whole married life or otherwise normal relations can justify sexual intercourse which is deliberately contraceptive and so intrinsically wrong".⁹

The great news is that there is a solution to this issue, the Church teaches that married people who wish to have a space between births, should have marital intercourse only during those times which the woman is infertile. This way it does not affect our moral principles. In other words, abstain from having intercourse during the woman's fertile period.

This is known as continence, and it demands control over sensual experiences. There can be authentic continence in marriage. The practice of continence requires self-discipline. It requires complete control over yourself and your emotions, which means controlling your inner drives and sexual desires.

"And, when the infertile period recurs, they use their married intimacy to express their mutual love and safeguard their fidelity toward one another. In doing this they certainly give proof of a true and authentic love."¹⁰

But this is not easy to do

You are right, for some it may even seem impossible to do, but with God's help anything is possible, if you let Him help you.

Have you ever heard of NFP ?

No, I haven't, what is it?

NFP (which stands for Natural Family Planning), is an uncontrolled and moral method of family planning that can help married couples either achieve or defer their pregnancies. NFP methods are based on keeping an eye on the signs and symptoms of the fertile and infertile periods of a woman's menstrual cycle. In other words, there are different ways of measuring the body temperature of the woman, and being able to tell if she is fertile or not.

With NFP, you are promoting an end to abortion, contraception, sterilization and in vitro fertilization. There are no drugs, equipments, or surgical procedures involved in the process (which sadly are currently being used to avoid undesirable pregnancies).

How can I learn more about NFP?

There are courses which teach you and your spouse how to use NFP in an effective way. The excellent news is as the USCCB (this stands for the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops) says that the methods of NFP respect the love-giving (unitive) and life-giving (procreative) nature of the conjugal act, because they support God's design for married love!

I have never had anyone take the time to explain any of this to me, I am so grateful to you for taking time off from your busy schedule to answer my question. I started arguing with you that due to population growth, birth control should be allowed within marriage, and now I have a total different mentality about this issue.

You are very welcome, I have tried with the utmost respect to share with you the Church's teaching on this issue. It has been my pleasure to have had this conversation with you, and I can see now based on your openness to our sharing that your understanding on this matter is more clear. Please know that I will be praying for you!

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Endnotes

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⁵ Catechism of the Catholic Church # 2370

⁶ Catechism of the Catholic Church # 2399

⁷ http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_25071968_humanae-vitae_en.html (# 10)

⁸ Karol Wojtyla "Love and Responsibility" Page 227

⁹ http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_25071968_humanae-vitae_en.html (#14)

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