



Choose Life, That You and Your Children May Live:
THE TRUTH ABOUT BIRTH CONTROL

St. Peter Catholic Church † Faith Fact † July 2010

Faith Facts

THE ANSWERS YOU NEED

Issue: Is contraception ever permitted?

Discussion: Under no circumstances is the use of contraception morally permissible. This infallible teaching of the Catholic Church flows from the natural law as given to us by God. As such, the teaching applies to all men and women (*Humanae Vitae* [HV] 18; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2036).[1]

Contraception frustrates the purpose of the marital act as the proper expression of love between husband and wife, and is opposed to the virtue of chastity in marriage (*Evangelium Vitae*, no. 13; cf. *Catechism*, no. 2349). Legitimate reasons on the part of spouses to avoid a new birth do not justify recourse to morally unacceptable means, such as contraception or direct sterilization (*Catechism*, nos. 2370, 2399).

Many people object to the Church's teaching on contraception. Some believe it is inconvenient and impractical, if not impossible. Others believe it is foolish and irresponsible in a world that seems overpopulated. Still others consider contraception and all aspects of their personal lives as private choices to be made according to their individual determination of what's best for them. Some will even argue that if the Catholic Church were truly opposed to abortion, it would allow for contraception. They reason that if couples could contracept, they wouldn't need to abort. These notions are false.

Objection #1: Ban on Contraception Is Impractical

Self-control is difficult, but with God's grace it is not impossible. Those who maintain that couples cannot remain chaste and open to life bear witness to the fact that sin holds us in slavery and impairs our ability to freely choose the good. Yet Christ has come to liberate us from the slavery of sin and death (cf. Rom. 6:17-23), and history is filled with examples of chaste and heroically generous people.

Hedonism—the pursuit of self-gratification—is the opposite of true love, because true love is not selfish or self-seeking (cf. 1 Cor. 13:4-7), but involves a total gift of self to others. Christ manifested His love for us by giving Himself up for us on the Cross. Spouses are called to imitate this love through their mutual self-gift.

The secular entertainment and advertising media, as well as many sex education programs, assume that self control is impossible and promote hedonism. They encourage contraception as a means of ensuring “safe sex.” This is tantamount to treating ourselves and our children as animals, not human persons who have been created in God's image, redeemed by Christ's blood, and reborn as “new creations” (2 Cor. 5:17) through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Hedonism separates the unitive (love-giving) and procreative (life-giving) aspects of the sexual act. Hedonism wants the pleasure of sexual intercourse without the responsibility. However, sexual intercourse that is deliberately closed to new life is inherently selfish, not “unitive.” The sexual act, which was made by God to be the ultimate expression of marital love, becomes tragically cheapened by contraception into a means for using others to satisfy one's own desires. All people want to be loved; nobody really wants to be used.

Objection #2: The Myth of Overpopulation

The world is comparatively empty. By allowing 3.5 square feet per person, all the people in the world could be brought together in an area the size of the city of Jacksonville, Florida. While everyone would admittedly be cramped in Jacksonville, it would be possible to allot each individual person 1,000 square feet (4,000 square feet of living space for a family of four) and still fit the entire world's population in the states of Nebraska, Kansas, and South Dakota, leaving the rest of the United States, plus Canada, Mexico, Central

and South America, Europe, Africa, Asia, and the Australian South Pacific areas completely uninhabited by man.[2]

Pope John Paul II exposes the lie of overpopulation for what it really is: a “conspiracy against life”:

The Pharaoh of old, haunted by the presence and increase of the children of Israel, submitted them to every kind of oppression and ordered that every male child born of the Hebrew women was to be killed (cf. Ex. 1:7-22). Today not a few of the powerful of the earth act in the same way (*Evangelium Vitae*, no. 16).

There are, however, serious problems concerning the distribution of the earth’s goods. But this poor distribution is the result of sin, not overpopulation. Many of the world’s calamities and starvation problems are caused by political corruption within third world countries and a lack of generosity on the part of those individuals and nations with greater abundance. With modern agricultural equipment, adequate food storage facilities, and technology to ensure clean drinking water, third world countries could make great strides in becoming self-sufficient. Developed countries like the United States could help provide these improvements.

Unfortunately, instead of really investing in development and self-sufficiency, superpowers like the United States have coercively tied financial aid to the acceptance of condoms and abortifacient (abortion-inducing) contraceptives as a means to control these countries. Genuine development, not a surplus of contraceptives, is what these countries truly need. As the Church affirms, people are a country’s greatest resource (cf. *Evangelium Vitae*, no. 16).

Objection #3: It’s a Personal Decision

All truly human actions are personal decisions, and involve personal freedom. However, having the freedom to choose does not make all choices good. When we freely make bad choices, choices that injure our relationships with God and others, we sin.

And so the conscience must be submissive to the truth. That is truly the key to happiness in this life and the next. Sadly, many people today have exchanged a conscience formed by the light of Christ and His Church for a conscience that is independent from objective morality. That’s why the *Catechism* (no. 1792) cites a “mistaken notion of autonomy of conscience” as a “source of errors of judgment in moral conduct.”[3]

The notion that each person can choose—at least to a certain extent—what the guiding principles of morality are is known as moral relativism, a concept the U.S. Supreme Court tragically endorsed in a 1992 decision regarding abortion: “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.”[4] Without necessarily setting out to do so, those who embrace moral relativism usurp God’s role as author and judge of His creation. Not surprisingly, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, head of the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, frequently refers to such relativism (often manifested as “cafeteria Catholicism”) as the central problem for the faith at the present time.

Objection #4: Contraception Will Reduce Abortion

This claim is patently false. The introduction of contraception dramatically increases abortion as well as the breakdown of families, divorce, and sexual relationships outside of marriage. In these cases, the illusory claim of “safe sex” leads to the inevitable failure of contraceptive devices.

Rather, the legalization of abortion has followed in every country that has embraced and promoted contraception. In the United States, the constitutional “right to privacy” declared by the U.S. Supreme Court to legitimize interstate trade of contraceptives (*Griswold v. Connecticut*, 1965) eventually served as the basis for making “abortion on demand” the law of the land (*Roe v. Wade*, 1973).

Couples not wanting to conceive will frequently resort to abortion as a final measure of contraception. Almost two decades following *Roe v. Wade*, Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy upheld the “right” to abortion partly because reproductive choices are now made based on the judicially created expectation that abortion would be available in the event contraception should fail.[5]

Pope John Paul II has also recognized the connection between abortion and contraception, noting that both: are rooted in a hedonistic mentality unwilling to accept responsibility in matters of sexuality, and they imply a self-centered concept of freedom, which regards procreation as an obstacle to personal

fulfillment. The life which could result from a sexual encounter thus becomes an enemy to be avoided at all costs, and abortion becomes the only possible decisive response to failed contraception (*Evangelium Vitae*, no. 13).

God's Plan for Marital Love

The Catholic vision of marital love and, indeed, the Judeo-Christian tradition bearing witness to thousands of years of divine Revelation, present a completely different perspective. Within the Judeo-Christian understanding, sexual relations are reserved for marriage. The Scriptures are clear that fornication (sexual relations before marriage) and adultery (sexual relations with someone other than one's spouse) are absolutely forbidden and condemned as a serious breach of God's will. God created the first man and woman within a material relationship, a family (cf. Gen. 1:26-27). They were to imitate God in whose image and likeness they were created. In Jesus Christ, we realize the fullness of God's plan for us. At the heart of the Christian Revelation is the mystery of the Trinity. It is the mystery of God in Himself. It is therefore the source of all other mysteries of faith, the light that enlightens them. It is the most fundamental and essential in the "hierarchy of the truths of faith" (Catechism, no. 234).

From all of eternity, God the Father, who is all good, all holy, and all true, has given of Himself completely and totally. This gift is so perfect that it is the eternal Son, who is God from God, Light from Light, True God from True God (Nicene Creed). Because the Son is equally God and the perfect reflection of the Father, who is all good, all true, and all holy, He imitates the Father and in turn gives of Himself completely and totally. This mutual self-gift of the Father and the Son is the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Trinity and the bond of unity in love within the Godhead.

God created us to imitate, with His help, the life of the Holy Trinity. Husband and wife are called to give themselves completely, holding nothing back, in imitation of the Trinity, whose gift of self is perfect. At the heart of the marriage is the marital act. And as husband and wife give themselves completely and totally to one another, they imitate God and, in so doing, may be blessed with a child. To hold back, to say no, to turn away from this gift of self and from an openness to the action of God, is a sin against God, one's spouse, and the deepest, most intimate part of oneself. The act of contraception attacks our ability to image God, to act in His likeness. With God's grace, the couple is invited to welcome life and, when children are given, to continue freely giving to them throughout their lives, raising them up in an atmosphere of heroic generosity and love, pouring out goodness and truth, and caring for one another. In this type of love, as with God, there is no room for selfishness.

This teaching is challenging, but it is the truth. Even without divine Revelation, the natural law bears witness in the heart of every man and woman that the act of contraception, including taking the pill or making use of a device to oppose the conception of a child in the midst of the marital act (cf. *Catechism*, no. 2370), runs contrary to the love act it is intended to express. In fact, contraception makes a lie of the love our sexuality was intended to express.

Natural Family Planning

On the other hand, the Church recognizes the natural right of parents to determine the number and spacing of births for just reasons. These reasons can take into account psychological and physical conditions of the father or mother and the obligations the parents have toward themselves, other children, extended family, and society in general. However, limiting and spacing births can be done without offending moral principles only if Natural Family Planning is used.[6] As Pope Paul VI taught:

The Church is coherent with herself when she considers recourse to the infecund [infertile] periods is licit, while at the same time condemning, as being always illicit, the use of means which directly contrary to fecundation [prevent conception], even if such use is inspired by reasons which may appear honest and serious. In reality, there are essential differences between the two cases. In the former case the married couple make legitimate use of a natural disposition; in the latter they impede the development of natural processes. It is true that, in either case, the married couple mutually agree in the positive will of avoiding children for plausible reasons, seeking the certainty that offspring will not arrive, but it is also true that only in the former case are they able to renounce the use of marriage in the fecund [fertile] periods when, for just motives, procreation is not desirable, while making use of it during infecund [infertile] periods to manifest their affection and to safeguard their mutual fidelity. By so doing, they give proof of a truly and integrally honest love (*Humanae Vitae*, no. 16).

The consequences of openness to life are profound. Children require a great deal of care, time, and resources. The demands placed upon parents may seem at times overwhelming. However, we are not free to deny the truth that they are a supreme gift from God (cf. Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 50) and that we should willingly accept them. If we suppress this truth, we turn our backs on God (cf. Rom. 1:18-25).

Prophetic Voice of the Church

Judeo-Christian tradition has consistently and unswervingly opposed contraception, dating back to the contraceptive act of Onan in Genesis 38:9. Some argue that God struck down Onan not because he contracepted, but because of his refusal to provide children to his brother's widow. However, such "levirate" laws were not enacted until long after the events of Genesis 38 and, in any event, Deuteronomy 25:5-10 refutes this interpretation, because the refusal "to perpetuate his brother's name" only resulted in a man's public humiliation, not his death.

All Christian denominations condemned contraception until 1930, when the Church of England repudiated Christian tradition and allowed it. By 1950 and the advent of the birth control pill, many other groups began to defect as well, so that at this time the Roman Catholic Church is an almost solitary voice against this evil.

The lies of the contraceptive mentality are most striking than in the cover-up about the abortifacient (abortion-causing) effects of many "contraceptive devices." Many commonly used birth control devices allow conception, but kill the child shortly thereafter. These include, but are not limited to, the IUD (the intrauterine device) and the birth control pill. In their 1994 publication *Birth Control and Christian Discipleship*, the Couple to Couple League reports that 2,950,000 early abortions are caused by the IUD each year in the United States. Between 2 million and 4 million early abortions are caused by the implantation-resisting effects of the pill in the United States.[7][8]

As noted, these statistics refer only to the United States. Throughout the world, an estimated 250 million abortions are caused by the IUD and pill each year. This almost equals the population of the United States, and exceeds the population of most countries in the world today.

At the time of Adam and Eve's original sin, God warned that the devil would strike at the offspring of the "woman" (Gen. 3:15). He also promised that the "woman" and her offspring would prevail (cf. Mt. 1:23-23; Lk. 1:26-35; Rev. 12:1-6). The only answer to the dishonesty and tragedy of birth control is Jesus, who is the way, the truth, and the life (Jn. 14:6). To eradicate this serious evil in our world today, we only have to take seriously our vocation as Christians and choose life, that we and our children may live (cf. Deut. 30:19).

[1] The term "contraception" does not apply to the use of Natural Family Planning (see pp. 112-113), nor to the use of interventions intended for a purpose other than the exclusion of children during sexual intercourse between a consenting man and woman. For example, certain medical conditions require the use of steroid treatments to regulate a woman's cycles. As a medical treatment to aid in the health of a woman, this is not wrong. However, this treatment may have the same effects as the pill. Further, such treatment may not entirely suppress ovulation, and thus act as an abortifacient if conception occurs. If this is the case, a serious reason must exist for a woman to use such treatment if she is having marital relations while taking the treatment. Provided that a sufficiently grave reason exists, and she takes precautions to avoid intercourse during potentially fertile periods, it is morally acceptable to receive such treatments.

[2] Rick and Jan Hess, *A Full Quiver* (Brentwood, TN: Wolgemuth & Hyatt, Publishers, Inc., 1989), 72-77.

[3] See generally chapter 8, "Going God's Way."

[4] *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*, 120 L.Ed. 2d 674, 698 (1992).

[5] *Ibid.*

[6] Cf. HV 16; Holy See, Charter of Rights of the Family (October 22, 1983), art. 3; *Catechism*, no. 2370.

[7] John F. Kippley, *Birth Control and Christian Discipleship* (Cincinnati: Couple to Couple League, 1994), 14.