

CONTRACEPTION AND STERILIZATION:

ARE THEY MORTAL SINS?



St. Peter Catholic Church † Faith Fact † August 2014

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ISSUE: Are contraception and sterilization always mortal sins?

RESPONSE: The Catholic Church has always taught that contraception and sterilization are sinful and that those who engage in such practices with full knowledge and consent commit mortal sins, severing their relationships with Jesus Christ.

DISCUSSION: Although the Catholic Church, through the Pope and the Magisterium, has been given the authority to “bind and loose” and to declare what is sinful, in reality that authority is only to speak for Christ, not to change what has already been divinely communicated. Unlike all of the other churches in existence, the Catholic Church has never changed a moral teaching. This extreme constancy of teaching makes the almost 2,000-year-old Catholic Church unique among institutions, offering strong evidence that it is divinely guided.

Throughout the past twenty centuries, much has been said by this unique institution about the grave sinfulness of contraception and sterilization.

191 AD: Clement of Alexandria, The Instructor of Children

“Because of its divine institution for the propagation of man, the seed is not to be vainly ejaculated, nor is it to be damaged, nor is it to be wasted” (2:10:91:2).

307 AD: Lactantius - Divine Institutes

“[Some] complain of the scantiness of their means, and allege that they have not enough for bringing up more children, as though, in truth, their means were in [their] power...or God did not daily make the rich poor and the poor rich. Wherefore, if any one on any account of poverty shall be unable to bring up children, it is better to abstain from relations with his wife” (6:20).

325 AD: Council of Nicaea I - Canon 1

“[I]f anyone in sound health has castrated [sterilized] himself, it behooves that such a one, if enrolled among the clergy, should cease [from his ministry], and that from henceforth no such person should be promoted. But, as it is evident that this is said of those who willfully do the thing and presume to castrate themselves, so if any have been made eunuchs by barbarians, or by their masters, and should otherwise be found worthy, such men this canon admits to the clergy.”

375 AD: Epiphanius of Salamis - Medicine Chest Against Heresies

“They [certain Egyptian heretics] exercise genital acts, yet prevent the conceiving of children. Not in order to produce offspring, but to satisfy lust, are they eager for corruption” (26:5:2).

391 AD: John Chrysostom - Homilies on Matthew

“[I]n truth, all men know that they who are under the power of this disease [the sin of covetousness] are wearied even of their father's old age [wishing him to die so they can inherit]; and that which is sweet, and universally desirable, the having of children, they esteem grievous and unwelcome. Many at least with this view have even paid money to be childless, and have mutilated nature, not only killing the newborn, but even acting to prevent their beginning to live [sterilization]” (28:5).

393 AD: Jerome - Against Jovinian

“But I wonder why he [the heretic Jovinianus] set Judah and Tamar before us for an example, unless perchance even harlots give him pleasure; or Onan, who was slain because he grudged his brother seed. Does he imagine that we approve of any sexual intercourse except for the procreation of children?” (1:19).

419 AD: Augustine - Marriage and Concupiscence

"I am supposing, then, although you are not lying [with your wife] for the sake of procreating offspring, you are not for the sake of lust obstructing their procreation by an evil prayer or an evil deed. Those who do this, although they are called husband and wife, are not; nor do they retain any reality of marriage, but with a respectable name cover a shame. Sometimes this lustful cruelty, or cruel lust, comes to this, that they even procure poisons of sterility [oral contraceptives]...Assuredly if both husband and wife are like this, they are not married, and if they were like this from the beginning they come together not joined in matrimony but in seduction. If both are not like this, I dare to say that either the wife is in a fashion the harlot of her husband or he is an adulterer with his own wife" (1:15:17).

522 AD: Caesarius of Arles - Sermons

"Who is he who cannot warn that no woman may take a potion [an oral contraceptive] so that she is unable to conceive or condemns in herself the nature which God willed to be fecund? As often as she could have conceived or given birth, of that many homicides she will be held guilty, and, unless she undergoes suitable penance, she will be damned by eternal death in hell. If a woman does not wish to have children, let her enter into a religious agreement with her husband; for chastity is the sole sterility of a Christian woman" (1:12).

1930 AD: Pope Pius XI - Casti Conubii (On Christian Marriage)

"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 offense against the law of God and of nature, and those who indulge in such are branded with the guilt of a grave sin."

1965 AD: Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World - Gaudium et Spes, Vatican II

"Relying on these principles, sons of the Church may not undertake methods of birth control which are found blameworthy by the teaching authority of the Church in its unfolding of the divine law" (51).

1968 AD: Pope Paul VI - Humanae Vitae (Of Human Life)

"Equally to be excluded, as the teaching authority of the Church has frequently declared, is direct sterilization, whether perpetual or temporary, whether of the man or of the woman. Similarly excluded is every action which, either in anticipation of the conjugal act, or in its accomplishment, or in the development of its natural consequences, propose, whether as an end or as a means, to render procreation impossible. To justify conjugal acts made intentionally infecund, one cannot invoke as valid reasons the lesser evil, or the fact that such acts would constitute a whole together with the fecund acts already performed or to follow later, and hence would share in one and the same moral goodness. In truth, if it is sometimes licit to tolerate a lesser evil in order to avoid a greater evil to promote a greater good, it is not licit, even for the gravest reasons, to do evil so that good may follow therefrom; that is to make into the object of a positive act of the will something which is intrinsically disorder, and hence unworthy of the human person, even when the intention is to safeguard or promote individual, family or social well-being. Consequently it is an error to think that a conjugal act which is deliberately made infecund and so is intrinsically dishonest could be made honest and right by the ensemble of a fecund conjugal life" (14).

1994 AD: Catechism of the Catholic Church

"The regulation of births represents one of the aspects of responsible fatherhood and motherhood. Legitimate intentions on the part of the spouses do not justify recourse to morally unacceptable means (for example, direct sterilization or contraception)" (2399).

After reading the above statements it should be clear that the Catholic Church does not leave much "wiggle room" on this issue. It should also be clear that rumors that at some time in the near future the Church will have to change this teaching are nothing more than the wishful thinking of its disobedient members.